Going for Refuge
Taking the Precepts

by

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Preface

The first two steps in the process of becoming a lay disciple of the Buddha are the going for refuge *(sarana gamana)* and the undertaking of the five precepts *(pañca-sila samadana)*. By the former step a person makes the commitment to accept the Triple Gem -- the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha -- as the guiding ideals of his life, by the latter he expresses his determination to bring his actions into harmony with these ideals through right conduct. The following two tracts were written for the purpose of giving a clear and concise explanation of these two steps. Though they are intended principally for those who have newly embraced the Buddha's teaching they will probably be found useful as well by long-term traditional Buddhists wanting to understand the meaning of practices with which they are already familiar and also by those who want to know what becoming a Buddhist involves.

In order to keep our treatment compact, and to avoid the intimidating format of a scholastic treatise, references to source material in the tracts themselves have been kept to a minimum. Thus we here indicate the sources upon which our account has drawn. *Going for Refuge* is based primarily upon the standard commentarial passage on the topic, found with only minor variations in the Khuddakapatha Atthakatha (Paramatthajotika), the Dighanikaya Atthakatha (Sumangalavilasini), and the Majjhimanikaya Atthakatha (Papañcasudani). The first has been translated by Ven. Bhikkhu Ñanamoli

in *Minor Readings and the Illustrator* (London: Pali Text Society, 1960), the third by Ven. Nyanaponika Thera in his *The Threefold Refuge* (B.P.S., The Wheel No. 76.).

The tract *Taking the Precepts* relies principally upon the commentarial explanations of the training rules in the Khuddakapatha Atthakatha, referred to above, and to the discussion of the courses of kamma in the Majjhimanikaya (commentary to No. 9, Sammaditthisutta). The former is available in English in Ven. Ñanamoli's *Minor Readings and Illustrator*, the latter in *Right Understanding*, Discourse and Commentary on the Sammaditthisutta, translated by Bhikkhu Soma (Sri Lanka: Bauddha Sahitya Sabha, 1946). Another useful work on the precepts was *The Five Precepts and the Five Ennoblers* by HRH Vajirañanavarorasa, a late Supreme Patriarch of Thailand (Bangkok: Mahamakut Rajavidyalaya Press, 1975). Also consulted was the section on the courses of karma in Vasubandhu's *Adhidharmakosa* and its commentary, a Sanskrit work of the Sarvastivada tradition.

Bhikkhu Bodhi

Going for Refuge

The Buddha's teaching can be thought of as a kind of building with its own distinct foundation, stories, stairs, and roof. Like any other building the teaching also has a door, and in order to enter it we have to enter through this door. The door of entrance to the teaching of the Buddha is the going for refuge to the Triple Gem -- that is, to the Buddha as the fully enlightened teacher, to the Dhamma as the truth taught by him, and to the Sangha as the community of his noble disciples. From ancient times to the present the going for refuge has functioned as the entranceway to the dispensation of the Buddha, giving admission to the rest of the teaching from its lowermost story to its top. All those who embrace the Buddha's teaching do so by passing through the door of taking refuge, while those already committed regularly reaffirm their conviction by making the same threefold profession:

> *Buddham saranam gacchami*
> I go for refuge to the Buddha;
>
> *Dhammam saranam gacchami*
> I go for refuge to the Dhamma;
>
> *Sangham saranam gacchami*
> I go for refuge to the Sangha.

As slight and commonplace as this step might seem, especially in comparison with the lofty achievements lying beyond, its importance should never be underestimated, as it is this act which imparts direction and forward momentum to the entire practice of the Buddhist path. Since the going for refuge plays such a crucial role it is vital that the act be properly understood both in its own nature and

in its implications for future development along the path. To open up the process of going for refuge to the eye of inner understanding, we here present an examination of the process in terms of its most significant aspects. These will be dealt with under the following eight headings: the reasons for taking refuge; the existence of a refuge; the identification of the refuge objects; the act of going for refuge; the function of going for refuge, methods of going for refuge; the corruption and breach of the going for refuge; and the similes for the refuges.

I. The Reasons for Taking Refuge

When it is said that the practice of the Buddha's teaching starts with taking refuge, this immediately raises an important question. The question is: "What need do we have for a refuge?" A refuge is a person, place, or thing giving protection from harm and danger. So when we begin a practice by going for refuge, this implies that the practice is intended to protect us from harm and danger. Our original question as to the need for a refuge can thus be translated into another question: "What is the harm and danger from which we need to be protected?" If we look at our lives in review we may not see ourselves exposed to any imminent personal danger. Our jobs may be steady, our health good, our families well-provided for, our resources adequate, and all this we may think gives us sufficient reason for considering ourselves secure. In such a case the going for refuge becomes entirely superfluous.

To understand the need for a refuge we must learn to see our position as it really is; that is, to see it accurately and against its total background. From the Buddhist perspective the human situation is similar to an iceberg: a small fraction of its mass appears above the surface, the vast substratum remains below, hidden out of view. Owing to the limits of our mental vision our insight fails to penetrate beneath the surface crust, to see our situation in its underlying depths. But there is no need to speak of what we cannot see; even what is immediately visible to us we rarely perceive with accuracy. The Buddha teaches that cognition is subservient to wish. In subtle ways concealed from ourselves our desires condition our perceptions, twisting them to fit into the mould they themselves want to impose. Thus our minds work by way of selection and exclusion. We take note of those things agreeable to our pre-conceptions; we blot out or distort those that threaten to throw them into disarray.

From the standpoint of a deeper, more comprehensive understanding the sense of security we ordinarily enjoy comes to view as a false security sustained by unawareness and the mind's capacity for subterfuge. Our position appears impregnable only because of the limitations and distortions of our outlook. The real way to safety, however, lies through correct insight, not through wishful thinking. To reach beyond fear and danger we must sharpen and widen our vision. We have to pierce through the deceptions that lull us into a comfortable complacency, to take a straight look down into the depths of our existence, without turning away uneasily or running after distractions. When we do so, it becomes increasingly clear that we move across a narrow footpath at the edge of a perilous abyss. In the words of the Buddha we are like a traveler passing through a thick forest bordered by a swamp and precipice; like a man swept away by a stream seeking safety by clutching at reeds; like a sailor crossing a turbulent ocean; or like a man pursued by venomous snakes and murderous enemies. The dangers to which we are exposed may not always be immediately evident to us. Very often they are subtle, camouflaged, difficult to

detect. But though we may not see them straightaway the plain fact remains that they are there all the same. If we wish to get free from them we must first make the effort to recognize them for what they are. This, however, calls for courage and determination.

On the basis of the Buddha's teaching the dangers that make the quest for a refuge necessary can be grouped into three general classes: (1) the dangers pertaining to the present life; (2) those pertaining to future lives; and (3) those pertaining to the general course of existence. Each of these in turn involves two aspects: (A) and objective aspect which is a particular feature of the world; and (B) a subjective aspect which is a corresponding feature of our mental constitution. We will now consider each of these in turn.

1. The dangers pertaining to the present life.

A. *Objective aspect.* The most obvious danger confronting us is the sheer fragility of our physical body and its material supports. From the moment we are born we are subject to disease, accident, and injury. Nature troubles us with disasters such as earthquakes and floods, societal existence with crime, exploitation, repression, and the threat of war. Events on the political, social, and economic fronts rarely pass very long without erupting into crisis. Attempts at reform and revolution always wind up repeating the same old story of stagnation, violence, and consequent disillusionment. Even in times of relative tranquillity the order of our lives is never quite perfect. Something or other always seems to be getting out of focus. Snags and predicaments follow each other endlessly.

Even though we might be fortunate enough to escape the serious adversities there is one we cannot avoid. This is death. We are bound to die, and with all our wealth, expertise, and power we still stand helpless before our inevitable mortality. Death weighs upon us from the time we are born. Every moment brings us closer to the inescapable. As we are drawn along, feeling secure in the midst of our comforts, we are like a man walking across a frozen lake, believing himself safe while the ice is cracking underfoot.

The dangers hanging over us are made even more problematic by their common feature of uncertainty. We have no knowledge when they will take place. If we knew calamity is going to hit we could at least prepare in advance to resign ourselves stoically. But we do not enjoy even this much edge on the future. Because we lack the benefit of foreknowledge our hopes stand up straight, moment after moment, coupled with a vague presentiment that any second, in a flash, they can suddenly be dashed to pieces. Our health might be stricken down by illness, our business fail, our friends turn against us, our loved ones die -- we do not know. We can have no guarantee that these reversals will not come upon us. Even death is only certain in that we can be sure it will strike. Exactly when it will strike still remains uncertain.

B. *Subjective aspect.* The adversities just sketched are objective features built into the world's constitution. On the one side there is calamity, crisis, and predicament, on the other the radical

uncertainty pervading them. The subjective aspect of the danger pertaining to the present life consists in our negative response to this twofold liability.

The element of uncertainty tends to provoke in us a persistent disquietude running beneath our surface self-assurance. At a deep interior level we sense the instability of our reliances, their transience and vulnerability to change, and this awareness produces a nagging apprehensiveness which rises at times to a pitch of anxiety. The source of our disquietude we may not always be able to pinpoint, but it remains lurking in the undercurrent of the mind -- an unlocalized fear that our familiar supports will suddenly be stripped away, leaving us without our usual frame of reference.

This anxiety is sufficient disturbance in itself. Yet often our fears are confirmed. The course of events follows a pattern of its own independently of our will, and the two do not necessarily coincide. The world thrown up illness, loss, and death, which strike when the time is ripe. When the course of events clashes with our will the outcome is pain and dissatisfaction. If the conflict is small we become angry, upset, depressed, or annoyed; if it is great we undergo anguish, grief, or despair. In either case a fundamental disharmony emerges from the cleavage between desire and the world, and the result, for us, is suffering.

The suffering that arises is not significant solely in itself. It has a symptomatic value, pointing to some more deeply grounded malady underlying it. This malady lies in our attitude towards the world. We operate out of a mental frame built up of expectations, projections, and demands. We expect reality to conform to our wishes, to submit to our mandates, to confirm our preconceptions, but this it refuses to do. When it refuses we meet pain and disappointment, born from the conflict between expectation and actuality. To escape this suffering one of the two must change, our will or the world. Since we cannot alter the nature of the world to make it harmonize with our will, the only alternative is to change ourselves, by putting away attachment and aversion towards the world. We have to relinquish our clinging, to stop hankering and grasping, to learn to view the fluctuation of events with a detached equanimity free from the swing of elation and dejection.

The mind of equanimity, poised beyond the play of worldly opposites, is the highest safety and security, but to gain this equanimity we stand in need of guidance. The guidance available cannot protect us from objective adversity. It can only safeguard us from the dangers of a negative response -- from anxiety, sorrow, frustration, and despair. This is the only protection possible, and because it grants us this essential protection such guidance can be considered a genuine refuge.

This is the first reason for going for refuge -- the need for protection from negative reactions to the dangers besetting us here and now.

2. The dangers pertaining to future lives

A. *Objective aspect.* Our liability to harm and danger does not end with death. From the perspective of

the Buddha's teaching the event of death is the prelude to a new birth and thus the potential passageway to still further suffering. The Buddha teaches that all living beings bound by ignorance and craving are subject to rebirth. So long as the basic drive to go on existing stands intact, the individualized current of existence continues on after death, inheriting the impressions and dispositions accumulated in the previous life. There is no soul to transmigrate from one life to the next, but there is an ongoing stream of consciousness which springs up following death in a new form appropriate to its own dominant tendencies.

Rebirth, according to Buddhism, can take place in any of six realms of becoming. The lowest of the six is the hells, regions of severe pain and torment where evil actions receive their due expiation. Then comes the animal kingdom where suffering prevails and brute force is the ruling power. Next is the realm of "hungry ghosts" *(petavisaya),* shadowy beings afflicted with strong desires they can never satisfy. Above them is the human world, with its familiar balance of happiness and suffering, virtue and evil. Then comes the world of the demi-gods *(asuras),* titanic beings obsessed by jealousy and ambition. And at the top stands the heavenly worlds inhabited by the *devas* or gods.

The first three realms of rebirth -- the hells, the animal kingdom, and the realm of ghosts -- together with the asuras, are called the "evil destinations" *(duggati)* or "plane of misery" *(apayabhumi).* They receive these names because of the preponderance of suffering found in them. The human world and the heavenly worlds are called, in contrast, the "happy destinations" *(sugati)* since they contain a preponderance of happiness. Rebirth in the evil destinations is considered especially unfortunate not only because of the intrinsic suffering they involve, but for another reason as well. Rebirth there is calamitous because escape from the evil destinations is extremely difficult. A fortunate rebirth depends on the performance of meritorious actions, but the beings in the evil destinations find little opportunity to acquire merit; thence the suffering in these realms tends to perpetuate itself in a circle very difficult to break. The Buddha says that if a yoke with a single hole was floating at random on the sea, and a blind turtle living in the sea were to surface once every hundred years -- the likelihood of the turtle pushing his neck through the hole in the yoke would be greater than that of a being in the evil destinations regaining human status. For these two reasons -- because of their inherent misery and because of the difficulty of escaping from them -- rebirth in the evil destinations is a grave danger pertaining to the future life, from which we need protection.

B. *Subjective aspect.* Protection from a fall into the plane of misery cannot be obtained from others. It can only be obtained by avoiding the causes leading to an unfortunate rebirth. The cause for rebirth into any specific plane of existence lies in our kamma, that is, our willed actions and volitions. Kamma divides into two classes, the wholesome and the unwholesome. The former are actions motivated by detachment, kindness, and understanding, the latter actions motivated by greed, hatred and delusion. These two classes of kamma generate rebirth into the two general planes of existence: wholesome kamma brings rebirth into the happy destinations, unwholesome kamma brings rebirth into the evil destinations.

We cannot obliterate the evil destinations themselves; they will continue on as long as the world itself endures. To avoid rebirth in these realms we can only keep watch over ourselves, by controlling our

actions so that they do not spill over into the unwholesome courses leading to a plunge into the plane of misery. But to avoid generating unwholesome kamma we need help, and that for two principal reasons.

First, we need help because the avenues of action open to us are so varied and numerous that we often do not know which way to turn. Some actions are obviously wholesome or unwholesome, but others are difficult to evaluate, throwing us into perplexity when we run up against them. To choose correctly we require guidance -- the clear indications of one who knows the ethical value of all actions and the pathways leading to the different realms of being.

The second reason we need help is because, even when we can discriminate right from wrong, we are often driven to pursue the wrong against our better judgment. Our actions do not always follow the counsel of our dispassionate decisions. They are often impulsive, driven by irrational urges we cannot master or control. By yielding to these drives we work our own harm even while helplessly watching ourselves do so. We have to gain mastery over our mind, to bring our capacity for action under the control of our sense of higher wisdom. But this is a task which requires discipline. To learn the right course of discipline we need the instructions of one who understands the subtle workings of the mind and can teach us how to conquer the obsessions which drive us into unhealthy self-destructive patterns of behavior. Because these instructions and the one who gives them help protect us from future harm and suffering, they can be considered a genuine refuge.

This is the second reason for going for refuge -- the need to achieve mastery over our capacity for action so as to avoid falling into the evil destinations in future lives.

3. The dangers pertaining to the general course of existence

A. *Objective aspect.* The perils to which we are exposed are immensely greater than those just discussed. Beyond the evident adversities and misfortunes of the present life and the risk of a fall into the plane of misery, there is a more fundamental and comprehensive danger running through the entire course of worldly existence. This is the intrinsic unsatisfactoriness of *samsara. Samsara* is the cycle of becoming, the round of birth, aging and death, which has been revolving through beginningless time. Rebirth does not take place only once, leading to an eternity in the life to come. The life-process repeats itself over and over, the whole pattern spelling itself out again and total with each new turn: each single birth issues in decay and death, each single death gives way to a new birth. Rebirth can be fortunate or miserable, but wherever it occurs no halt is made to the revolution of the wheel. The law of impermanence imposes its decree upon the entire domain of sentient life; whatever arises must eventually cease. Even the heavens provide no outlet; life there also ends when the kamma that brought a heavenly birth is exhausted, to be followed by a re-arising in some other plane, perhaps in the miserable abodes.

Because of this pervasive transience all forms of conditioned existence appear to the eye of wisdom as essentially *dukkha*, unsatisfactory or suffering. None of our supports and reliances is exempt from the necessity to change and pass away. Thence what we resort to for comfort and enjoyment is in reality a

concealed form of suffering; what we rely on for security is itself exposed to danger; what we turn to for protection itself needs to be protected. Nothing that we want to hold to can be held onto forever, without perishing: "It is crumbling away, it is crumbling away, therefore it is called 'the world'."

Youth issues in old age, health in sickness, life in death. All union ends in separation, and in the pain that accompanies separation. But to understand the situation in its full depth and gravity we must multiply it by infinity. From time without beginning we have been transmigrating through the round of existence, encountering the same experiences again and again with vertiginous frequency: birth, aging, sickness and death, separation and loss, failure and frustration. Repeatedly we have made the plunge into the plane of misery; times beyond counting we have been animal, ghost, and denizen of hell. Over and over we have experienced suffering, violence, grief, despair. The Buddha declares that the amount of tears and blood we have shed in the course of our samsaric wandering is greater than the waters in the ocean; the bones we have left behind could form a heap higher than the Himalaya mountains. We have met this suffering countless times in the past, and as long as the causes of our cycling in *samsara* are not cut off we risk meeting more of the same in the course of our future wandering.

B. *Subjective aspect.* To escape from these dangers there is only one way of release: to turn away from all forms of existence, even the most sublime. But for the turning away to be effective we must cut off the causes that hold us in bondage to the round. The basic causes that sustain our wandering in *samsara* lie within ourselves. We roam from life to life, the Buddha teaches, because we are driven by a profound insatiable urge for the perpetuation of our being. This urge the Buddha calls *bhava-tanha,* the craving for existence. While craving for existence remains operative, even if only latently, death itself is no barrier to the continuation of the life-process. Craving will bridge the vacuum created by death, generating a new form of existence determined by the previously accumulated storage of kamma. Thus craving and existence sustain each other in succession. Craving brings forth a new existence; the new existence gives the ground for craving to resume its search for gratification.

Underlying this vicious nexus which links together craving and repeated existence is a still more primordial factor called "ignorance" *(avijja).* Ignorance is a basic unawareness of the true nature of things, a beginningless state of spiritual unknowing. The unawareness operates in two distinct ways: on one side it obscures correct cognition, on the other it creates a net of cognitive and perceptual distortions. Owing to ignorance we see beauty in things that are really repulsive, permanence in the impermanent, pleasure in the unpleasurable, and selfhood in selfless, transient, unsubstantial phenomena. These delusions sustain the forward drive of craving. Like a donkey chasing a carrot suspended from a cart, dangling before its face, we rush headlong after the appearances of beauty, permanence, pleasure and selfhood, only to find ourselves still empty-handed, more tightly entangled in the samsaric round.

To be freed from this futile and profitless pattern it is necessary to eradicate the craving that keeps it in motion, not merely temporarily but permanently and completely. To eradicate craving the ignorance which supports it has to be dislodged, for as long as ignorance is allowed to weave its illusions the ground is present for craving to revive. The antidote to ignorance is wisdom *(pañña).* Wisdom is the penetrating knowledge which tears aside the veils of ignorance in order to "see things as they really are."

It is not mere conceptual knowledge, but an experience that must be generated in ourselves; it has to be made direct, immediate and personal. To arouse this wisdom we need instruction, help, and guidance -- someone who will teach us what we must understand and see for ourselves, and the methods by which we can arouse the liberating wisdom that will cut the cords binding us to repeated becoming. Since those who give this guidance, and the instructions themselves, provide protection from the perils of transmigration they can be considered a genuine refuge.

This is the third reason for going for refuge -- the need for deliverance from the pervasive unsatisfactoriness of *Samsara.*

II. The Existence of a Refuge

To realize that the human situation impels the search for a refuge is a necessary condition for taking refuge, but is not in itself a sufficient condition. To go for refuge we must also become convinced that an effective refuge actually exists. But before we can decide on the existence of a refuge we first have to determine for ourselves exactly what a refuge is.

The dictionary defines "refuge" as a shelter or protection from danger and distress, a person or place giving such protection, and an expedient used to obtain such protection. This tallies with the explanation of the Pali word *sarana,* meaning "refuge", which has come down in the Pali commentaries. The commentaries gloss the word *sarana* with another word meaning "to crush" *(himsati),* explaining that "when people have gone for refuge, then by that very going for refuge it crushes, dispels, removes, and stops their fear, anguish, suffering, risk of unhappy rebirth and defilement."[1]

These explanations suggest two essential qualifications of a refuge. (1) First, a refuge must be itself beyond danger and distress. A person or thing subject to danger is not secure in itself, and thus cannot give security to others. Only what is beyond fear and danger can be confidently relied upon for protection. (2) Second, the purported refuge must be accessible to us. A state beyond fear and danger that is inaccessible is irrelevant to our concerns and thus cannot function as a refuge. In order for something to serve as a refuge it must be approachable, capable of giving protection from danger.

From this abstract determination of the qualifications of a refuge we can return to the concrete question at hand. Does there exist a refuge able to give protection from the three types of dangers delineated above: from anxiety, frustration, sorrow and distress in the present life; from the risk of an unhappy destination after death; and from continued transmigration in *samsara?* The task of working out an answer to this question has to be approached cautiously. We must recognize at once that an objectively verifiable, publicly demonstrable answer cannot be given. The existence of a refuge, or the specification of a particular refuge, cannot be proven logically in an irrefutable manner binding on all. The most that can be done is to adduce cogent grounds for believing that certain persons or objects possess the qualifications of a refuge. The rest depends upon faith, a confidence born out of trust, at least until that initial assent is transformed into knowledge by means of direct experience. But even then the

verification remains inward and personal, a matter of subjective appropriation rather than of logical proof or objective demonstration.

From the Buddhist perspective there are three refuges which together make available complete protection from danger and distress. These three are the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. The three are not separate refuges each sufficient in itself; rather they are interrelated members of a single effective refuge which divides into three by way of a distinction in the characteristics and functions of its members. Why such a distinction is necessary becomes clear if we consider the order in which the three are presented.

The Buddha comes first because he is a person. Since we are persons we naturally look to another person for guidance, inspiration, and direction. When it is ultimate deliverance that is at stake, what we look for in the first place is a person who has himself reached complete freedom from danger and can lead us to the same state of safety. This is the Buddha, the enlightened one, who comes first in the triad for the reason that he is the person who discovers, achieves, and proclaims the state of refuge. In the second place we need that state of refuge itself, the state beyond fear and danger; then we need a path leading to this goal; and also we need a set of instructions guiding us along the path. This is the Dhamma, which as we will see has this threefold denotation. Then, in the third place, we need persons who began like ourselves -- as ordinary people troubled by afflictions -- and by following the way taught by the guide reached the state of safety beyond fear and danger. This is the Sangha, the community of spiritual persons who have entered the path, realized the goal, and can now teach the path to others.

Within the triad each member works in harmony with the other two to make the means of deliverance available and effective. The Buddha serves as the indicator of refuge. He is not a savior who can bestow salvation through the agency of his person. Salvation or deliverance depends upon us, upon our own vigor and dedication in the practice of the teaching. The Buddha is primarily a teacher, an expounder of the path, who points out the way we ourselves must tread with our own energy and intelligence. The Dhamma is the actual refuge. As the goal of the teaching the Dhamma is the state of security free from danger; as the path it is the means for arriving at the goal; and as the verbal teaching it is the body of instructions describing the way to practice the path. But to make effective use of the means at our disposal we need the help of others who are familiar with the path. Those who know the path make up the Sangha, the helpers in finding refuge, the union of spiritual friends who can lead us to our own attainment of the path.

This triadic structure of the three refuges can be understood with the aid of a simple analogy. If we are ill and want to get well we need a doctor to diagnose our illness and prescribe a remedy; we need medicine to cure our illness; and we need attendants to look after our requirements. The doctor and attendants cannot cure us. The most they can do for us is to give us the right medicine and make sure that we take it. The medicine is the actual remedy which restores our health. Similarly, when seeking relief from suffering and distress, we rely on the Buddha as the physician who can find out the cause of our illness and show us the way to get well; we rely on the Dhamma as the medicine which cures our afflictions; and we rely on the Sangha as the attendants who will help us take the medicine. To get well we have to take the medicine. We can't just sit back and expect the doctor to cure us all by himself. In

the same way, to find deliverance from suffering, we have to practice the Dhamma, for the Dhamma is the actual refuge which leads to the state of deliverance.

III. Identification of the Objects of Refuge

The fruitfulness of the act of taking refuge is proportional to the depth and precision with which we understand the nature of the refuge-objects. Therefore these objects have to be identified with precision and correctly understood. Each refuge-object has a double layer of signification, one concrete and mundane, the other intangible and supramundane. The two are not entirely distinct, but intermesh in such a way that the former acts as a vehicle for the latter. An examination of each refuge in turn will make clear what their twofold signification is and how they interfuse.

1. The Buddha

The Buddha as refuge can be considered first. On one level the word "Buddha" refers to a particular figure -- the man Siddhattha Gotama who lived in India in the fifth century B.C. When we take refuge in the Buddha, we take refuge in this person, for he is the teacher of the Dhamma and the historical founder of Buddhism. However, in going to him for refuge, we do not take refuge in him merely in his concrete particularity. We rely upon him as the Buddha, the enlightened one, and this has a significance transcending the limits of what can be given by empirical, historical fact. What enables the Buddha to function as a refuge is his actualization of a supramundane attainment. This attainment is the state of Buddhahood or perfect enlightenment, a state which has been realized by other persons in the past and will be realized again in the future. Those who realize this state are Buddhas. When we take refuge in the Buddha we rely upon him as a refuge because he embodies this attainment in himself. It is his Buddhahood that makes the Buddha a refuge.

But what is the Buddhahood of the Buddha? In brief the Buddhahood of the Buddha is the sum total of the qualities possessed by that person named Gotama which make him a Buddha. These qualities can be summed up as the abandonment of all defects and the acquisition of all virtues.

The defects abandoned are the defilements *(kilesa)* together with their residual impressions *(vasana)*. The defilements are afflictive mental forces which cause inner corruption and disturbance and motivate unwholesome actions. Their principle members are greed, hatred, and delusion; from these all the secondary defilements derive. In the Buddha these defilements have been abandoned totally, completely, and finally. They are abandoned *totally* in that all defilements have been destroyed with none remaining. They are abandoned *completely* in that each one has been destroyed at the root, without residue. And they have been abandoned *finally* in that they can never arise again in the future.

The virtues acquired by the Buddha are very numerous, but two stand out as paramount: great wisdom *(mahapañña)* and great compassion *(maha-karuna)*. The great wisdom of the Buddha has two aspects --

extensiveness of range and profundity of view. Through the extensive range of his wisdom the Buddha understands the totality of existent phenomena; through his profundity of view he understands the precise mode of existence of each phenomenon.

The Buddha's wisdom does not abide in passive contemplation but issues in great compassion. Through his great compassion the Buddha comes forth to work for the welfare of others. He takes up the burden of toiling for the good of sentient beings, actively and fearlessly, in order to lead them to deliverance from suffering.

When we go for refuge to the Buddha we resort to him as the supreme embodiment of purity, wisdom and compassion, the peerless teacher who can guide us to safety out of the perilous ocean of *samsara.*

2. The Dhamma

The Dhamma too involves a double reference. At the elementary level the word "Dhamma" signifies the teaching of the Buddha -- the conceptually formulated, verbally expressed set of doctrines taught by or deriving from the historical figure Gotama. This teaching, called "the transmission" *(agama),* is contained in the *Tipitaka* or three collections of scripture and in the commentaries and expository works which explain them. The three collections are the Vinayapitaka, the Suttapitaka, and the Abhidhammapitaka. The Vinayapitaka collects together all the monastic rules and regulations detailing the discipline for Buddhist monks and nuns. The Suttapitaka contains the discourses of the Buddha expounding his doctrine and the practice of his path. The Abhidhammapitaka presents an exposition of the sphere of actuality from the standpoint of a precise philosophical understanding which analyzes actuality into its fundamental constituting elements and shows how these elements lock together through a network of conditional relations.

The verbally transmitted Dhamma contained in the scriptures and commentaries serves as the conduit to a deeper level of meaning communicated through its words and expressions. This is the Dhamma of actual achievement *(adhigama),* which comprises the path *(magga)* and the goal *(attha).* The goal is the final end of the teaching, *nibbana,* the complete cessation of suffering, the unconditioned state outside and beyond the round of impermanent phenomena making up *samsara.* This goal is to be reached by a specific path, a course of practice bringing its attainment, namely the noble eightfold path -- right views, right intentions, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The path divides into two stages, a mundane path and a supramundane path. The mundane path is the course of application developed when its factors are cultivated in daily life and in periods of intensified practice. The supramundane path is a state of wisdom-consciousness that arises when all the requisite conditions for realization are fully matured, usually at the peak of intensified practice. This path actually represents a state in the experience of enlightenment, having the dual function of realizing nibbana and eradicating defilements.

The supramundane path comes only in momentary breakthroughs which, when they occur, effect radical

transformations in the structure of the mind. These breakthroughs are four in number, called the four paths. The four divide according to their ability to cut the successively subtler "fetters" causing to *samsara.* The first path, the initial breakthrough to enlightenment, is the path of stream entry *(sotapattimagga),* which eradicates the fetters of ego-affirming views, doubt, and clinging to rites and wrong observances. The second, called the path of the once-returner *(sakadagamimagga),* does not cut off any fetters but weakens their underlying roots. The third, the path of the non-returner *(anagamimagga),* eliminates the fetters of sensual desire and ill-will. And the forth, the path of arahatship *(arahattamagga),* eradicates the five remaining fetters -- desire for existence in the spheres of fine material and immaterial being, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. Each path-moment is followed immediately by several moments of another supramundane experience called fruition *(phala),* which comes in four stages corresponding to the four paths. Fruition marks the enjoyment of the freedom from defilement effected by the preceding path-moment. It is the state of release or experiential freedom which comes when the fetters are broken.

Earlier it was said that the Dhamma is the actual refuge. In the light of the distinctions just drawn this statement can now be made more precise. The verbal teaching is essentially a map, a body of instructions and guidelines. Since we have to rely on these instructions to realize the goal, the teaching counts as an actual refuge, but it is so in a derivative way. Thus we can call it an actual but indirect refuge. The mundane path is direct, since it must be practiced, but because it serves principally as preparation for the supramundane path its function is purely provisional; thus it is an actual and direct but provisional refuge. The supramundane path apprehends nibbana, and once attained leads irreversibly to the goal; thence it may be called an actual, direct, and superior refuge. However, even the supramundane path is a conditioned phenomenon sharing the characteristic of impermanence common to all conditioned phenomena. Moreover, as a means to an end, it possesses instrumental value only, not intrinsic value. Thus its status as a refuge is not ultimate. Ultimate status as a refuge belongs exclusively to the goal, to the unconditioned state of nibbana, which therefore among all three refuges can alone be considered the refuge which is actual, direct, superior, and ultimate. It is the final resort, the island of peace, the sanctuary offering permanent shelter from the fears and dangers of samsaric becoming.

3. The Sangha

At the conventional or mundane level the Sangha signifies the Bhikkhu-Sangha, the order of monks. The Sangha here is an institutional body governed by formally promulgated regulations. Its doors of membership are open to any candidate meeting the required standards. All that is needed to enter the Sangha is to undergo ordination according to the procedure laid down in the Vinaya, the system of monastic discipline.

Despite its formal character, the order of monks fulfills an indispensable role in the preservation and perpetuation of the Buddha's dispensation. In an unbroken lineage extending back over twenty-five hundred years, the monastic order has served as the custodian of the Dhamma. The mode of life it makes possible permits it to exercise this function. The Buddha's dispensation, as we suggested, possesses a twofold character; it is a path of practice leading to liberation from suffering, and also a distinctive set of

doctrines embedded in scriptures expounding the details of this path. The Sangha bears the responsibility for maintaining both aspects of the dispensation. Its members assume the burden of continuing the tradition of practice with the aim of showing that the goal can be realized and deliverance attained. They also take up the task of preserving the doctrines, seeing to it that the scriptures are taught and transmitted to posterity free from distortion and misinterpretation.

For these reasons the institutional Sangha is extremely vital to the perpetuation of the Buddha's teaching. However, the order of monks is not itself the Sangha which takes the position of the third refuge. The Sangha which serves as refuge is not an institutional body but an unchartered spiritual community comprising all those who have achieved penetration of the innermost meaning of the Buddha's teaching. The Sangha-refuge is the ariyan Sangha, the noble community, made up exclusively of ariyans, person of superior spiritual stature. Its membership is not bound together by formal ecclesiastical ties but by the invisible bond of a common inward realization. The one requirement for admission is the attainment of this realization, which in itself is sufficient to grant entrance.

Though the way of life laid down for the monastic order, with its emphasis on renunciation and meditation, is most conducive to attaining the state of an ariyan, the monastic Sangha and the ariyan Sangha are not coextensive. Their makeup can differ, and that for two reasons: first, because many monks -- the vast majority in fact -- are still worldlings *(puthujjana)* and thence cannot function as a refuge; and second, because the ariyan Sangha can also include laymen. Membership in the ariyan Sangha depends solely on spiritual achievement and not on formal ordination. Anyone -- layman or monk -- who penetrates the Buddha's teaching by direct vision gains admission through that very attainment itself.[2]

The membership of the ariyan Sangha comprises eight types of persons, which unite into four pairs. The first pair consists of the person standing on the path of stream-entry and the stream-enterer, who has entered the way to deliverance and will attain the goal in a maximum of seven lives; the second pair of the person standing on the path of the once-returner and the once-returner, who will return to the human world only one more time before reaching the goal; the third pair of the person standing on the path of the non-returner and the non-returner, who will not come back to the human world again but will take rebirth in a pure heavenly world where he will reach the final goal; and the fourth pair of the person standing on the path of arahatship and the arahat, who has expelled all defilements and cut off the ten fetters causing bondage to *samsara.*

The eight persons can be divided in another way into two general classes. One consists of those who, by penetrating the teaching, have entered the supramundane path to liberation but still must practice further to arrive at the goal. These include the first seven types of ariyan persons, who are collectively called "trainees" or "learners" *(sekha)* because they are still in the process of training. The second class comprises the arahats, who have completed the practice and fully actualized the goal. These are called "beyond training" *(asekha)* because they have no further training left to undertake.

Both the learners and the arahats have directly understood the essential import of the Buddha's teaching

for themselves. The teaching has taken root in them, and to the extent that any work remains to be done they no longer depend on others to bring it to its consummation. By virtue of this inner mastery these individuals possess the qualifications needed to guide others towards the goal. Hence the ariyan Sangha, the community of noble persons, can function as a refuge.

IV. The Act of Going for Refuge

To enter the door to the teaching of the Buddha it is not enough merely to know the reference of the refuge-objects. The door of entrance to the teaching is the going for refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. To understand what the refuge-objects mean is one thing, to go to them for refuge is another, and it is the going for refuge alone that constitutes the actual entrance to the dispensation.

But what is the going for refuge? At first glance it would seem to be the formal commitment to the Triple Gem expressed by reciting the formula of refuge, for it is this act which marks the embracing of the Buddha's teaching. Such an understanding, however, would be superficial. The treatises make it clear that the true going for refuge involves much more than the reciting of a pre-established formula. They indicate that beneath the verbal profession of taking refuge there runs concurrently another process that is essentially inward and spiritual. This other process is the mental commitment to the taking of refuge.

The going for refuge, as defined by the commentaries, is in reality an occasion of consciousness: "It is an act of consciousness devoid of defilements, (motivated) by confidence in and reverence for (the Triple Gem), taking (the Triple Gem) as the supreme resort."[3] That the act is said to be "devoid of defilements" stresses the need for sincerity of aim. Refuge is not pure if undertaken with defiled motivation -- out of desire for recognition, pride, or fear of blame. The only valid motivation for taking refuge is confidence and reverence directed towards the Triple Gem. The act of consciousness motivated by confidence and reverence occurs "taking the Triple Gem as the supreme resort," *(parayana).* That the Triple Gem is taken as the "supreme resort" means that it is perceived as the sole source of deliverance. By turning to the threefold refuge as supreme resort, the going for refuge becomes an act of opening and self-surrender. We drop our defenses before the objects of refuge and open ourselves to their capacity to help. We surrender our ego, our claim to self-sufficiency, and reach out to the refuge-objects in the trust that they can guide us to release from our confusion, turmoil, and pain.

Like any other act of consciousness the going for refuge is a complex process made up of many factors. These factors can be classified by way of three basic faculties: intelligence, volition, and emotion. To bring the act of going for refuge into clearer focus we will take the mental process behind the outer act, divide it by way of these faculties, and see how each contributes to its total character. That is, we will examine the going for refuge as an act of intelligence, will, and emotion.

Before doing this, however, one word of caution is necessary. Any particular phenomenon represents far more than is immediately visible even to a deeply probing inspection. A seed, for example, has a much greater significance than the grain of organic matter that meets the eye. On one side it collects into itself

the entire history of the trees that went into its making; on the other it points beyond to the many potential trees locked up in its hull. Similarly the act of consciousness involved in taking refuge represents the crystallization of a vast network of forces extending backwards, forwards, and outwards in all directions. It simultaneously stands for the many lines of experience converging upon its formation out of the dim recesses of the past, and the potential for future lines of development barely adumbrated in its own immediate content. This applies equally to the act of taking refuge as a whole and to each of its constituting factors: both the whole and its parts must be seen as momentary concretions with a vast history, past and future, hidden from our sight. Therefore what emerges out of an analytical scrutiny of the refuge-act should be understood to be only a fraction of what the act implies by way of background and future evolution.

Turning to the act of taking refuge itself, we find in the first place that it is an act of understanding. Though inspired by reverence and trust, it must be guided by vision, by an intelligent perceptivity which protects it from the dangers of blind emotion. The faculty of intelligence steers the act of refuge towards the actualization of its inner urge for liberation. It distinguishes the goal from the distractions, and prevents the aspirant from deviating from his quest for the goal to go in pursuit of futile ends. For this reason we find that in the formulation of the noble eightfold path right view is given first. To follow the path we must see where it leads from, where it goes, and the steps that must be taken to get from the one point to the other.

In its initial form the faculty of intelligence involved in taking refuge comprehends the basic unsatisfactoriness of existence which makes reliance on a refuge necessary. Suffering has to be seen as a pervasive feature infecting our existence at its root, which cannot be eliminated by superficial palliatives but only by a throughgoing treatment. We must come to see further that the causes of our dissatisfaction and unrest lie within ourselves, in our clinging, craving, and delusions, and that to get free from suffering we must follow a course which extinguishes its causes.

The mind also has to grasp the reliability of the refuge-objects. Absolute certainty as to the emancipating power of the teaching can only come later, with the attainment of the path, but already at the outset an intelligent conviction must be established that the refuge-objects are capable of providing help. To this end the Buddha has to be examined by investigating the records of his life and character; his teaching searched for contradictions and irrationalities; and the Sangha approached to see if it is worthy of trust and confidence. Only if they pass these tests can they be considered dependable supports for the achievement of our ultimate aim.

Intelligence comes into play not only with the initial decision to take refuge, but throughout the entire course of practice. The growth of understanding brings a deeper commitment to the refuges, and the deepening of the inner refuge facilitates the growth of understanding. The climax of this process of reciprocal development is the attainment of the supramundane path. When the path arises, penetrating the truth of the teaching, the refuge becomes irreversible, for it has been verified by direct experience.

The going for refuge is also an act of volition. It results from a voluntary decision free from coercion or

outside pressures. It is a choice that must be *aparappaccaya,* "not compelled by others." This freely chosen act brings about a far-reaching restructuring of volition. Whereas previously the will might have been scattered among a multitude of interests and concerns, when the taking of refuge gains ascendency the will becomes ordered in a unified way determined by the new commitment. The spiritual ideal comes to the center of the inner life, expelling the less crucial concerns and relegating the others to a position subordinate to its own direction. In this way the act of refuge brings to the mind a harmonization of values, which now ascend to and converge upon the fundamental aspiration for deliverance as the guiding purpose of all activity.

The act of taking refuge also effects a deep-seated reversal in the movement of the will. Before refuge is taken the will tends to move in an outward direction, pushing for the extension of its bounds of self-identity. It seeks to gain increasing territory for the self, to widen the range of ownership, control and domination. When refuge is sought in the teaching of the Buddha the ground is laid for this pattern to be undermined and turned around. The Buddha teaches that our drive for self-expansion is the root of our bondage. It is a mode of craving, of grasping and clinging, leading headlong into frustration and despair. When this is understood the danger in egocentric seeking comes to the surface and the will turns in the opposite direction, moving towards renunciation and detachment. The objects of clinging are gradually relinquished, the sense of "I" and "mine" withdrawn from the objects to which it has attached itself. Ultimate deliverance is now seen to lie, not in the extension of the ego to the limits of infinity, but in the utter abolition of the ego-delusion at its base.

The third aspect of going for refuge is the emotional. While going for refuge requires more than emotional fervor, it also cannot come to full fruition without the inspiring upward pull of the emotions. The emotions entering into the refuge act are principally three: confidence, reverence, and love. Confidence *(pasada)* is a feeling of serene trust in the protective power of the refuge-objects, based on a clear understanding of their qualities and functions. Confidence gives rise to reverence *(gaurava),* a sense of awe, esteem, and veneration born from a growing awareness of the sublime and lofty nature of the Triple Gem. Yet this reverence does not remain cool, formal, and aloof. As we experience the transforming effect of the Dhamma on our life, reverence awakens *(pema).* Love adds the element of warmth and vitality to the spiritual life. It kindles the flame of devotion, coming to expression in acts of dedicated service by which we seek to extend the protective and liberative capacity of the threefold refuge to others.

V. The Function of Going for Refuge

The going for refuge is the door of entrance to the teaching of the Buddha. It functions in the context of the teaching as the entranceway to all the practices of the Buddhist discipline. To engage in the practices in their proper setting we have to enter them through the door of taking refuge, just as to go into a restaurant and have a meal we have to enter through the door. If we merely stand outside the restaurant and read the menu on the window we may come away with a thorough knowledge of the menu but not with a satisfied appetite. Similarly, by merely studying and admiring the Buddha's teaching we do not enter upon its practice. Even if we abstract certain elements of practice for our personal use without first

taking refuge, our efforts cannot count as the actual practice of the Buddha's teaching. They are only practices derived from the teaching, or practices in harmony with the teaching, but so long as they are not conjoined with a mental attitude of taking refuge in the Triple Gem they have not yet become the practice of the Buddha's teaching.

To bring out the significance of going for refuge we can consider a contrast between two individuals. One meticulously observes the moral principles embedded in the five precepts *(pañcasila)*. He does not formally undertake the precepts in the context of Buddhist ethical practice but spontaneously conforms to the standards of conduct they enjoin through his own innate sense of right and wrong; that is, he follows them as part of natural morality. We might further suppose that he practices meditation several hours a day, but does this not in the framework of the Dhamma but simply as a means to enjoy peace of mind here and now. We can further suppose that this person has met the Buddha's teaching, appreciates it and respects it, but does not feel sufficiently convinced to acknowledge its truth or find himself impelled to go for refuge.

On the other hand let us suppose there is another person whose circumstances prevent perfect observance of the precepts and who cannot find leisure for practicing meditation. But though he lacks these achievements, from the depths of his heart, with full sincerity, understanding, and dedication of purpose he has gone for refuge to the Triple Gem. Comparing these two persons we can ask whose mental attitude is of greater long-term spiritual value -- that of the person who without going for refuge observes the moral principles embedded in the five precepts and practices meditation several hours a day, or that of the other person who cannot accomplish these practices but has sincerely gone for refuge to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. No clear pronouncement on this case is found in the suttas and commentaries, but enough indication is given to support an intelligent guess. On this basis we would say that the mental attitude of the second person, who has gone for refuge with clear understanding and sincerity of heart, is of greater long-term spiritual value. The reason for such a judgment is as follows.

As a result of his moral and meditative practices the first individual will enjoy peace and happiness in his present life, and will accumulate merit which will lead to a favorable rebirth in the future. However, when that merit ripens, it will become exhausted and expend its force without leading to further spiritual development. When the fortunate rebirth resulting from the merit comes to an end, it will be followed by rebirth in some other plane, as determined by stored-up kamma, and the person will continue to revolve in the cycle of existence. His virtuous undertakings do not contribute directly to the transcending of the samsaric round.

On the other hand the person who has sincerely gone for refuge to the Triple Gem, without being capable of higher practices, still lays the foundation for spiritual progress in future lives merely by his heartfelt act of seeking refuge. Of course he has to reap the results of his kamma and cannot escape them by taking refuge, but all the same the mental act of going for refuge, if it is truly the focus of his inner life, becomes a powerful positive kamma in itself. It will function as a link tending to bring him into connection with the Buddha's dispensation in future lives, thereby aiding his chances for further progress. And if he fails to reach deliverance within the dispensation of the present Buddha it will very likely lead him to the dispensations of future Buddhas, until he eventually reaches the goal. Since this all

comes about through the germination of that mental act of going for refuge, we can understand that the taking of refuge is very essential.

The importance of going for refuge can be further gauged through a textual simile comparing faith to a seed. Since faith is the motivating force behind the act of refuge, the analogy may be transferred to the refuge-act itself. We explained earlier that the mental act of going for refuge calls into play three cardinal faculties -- understanding, will, and emotion. These three faculties are already present even in that very simple, basic act of seeking refuge, contained there as seeds with the potential to develop into the flowers and fruits of the Buddhist spiritual life. The understanding that leads a man to go for refuge -- the understanding of the danger and fearfulness of samsaric existence -- this is the seed for the faculty of wisdom which eventually issues in direct penetration of the four noble truths. The element of volition is the seed for the will to renunciation -- the driving force that impels a man to renounce his craving, enjoyments, and egoistic clingings in order to go forth in search of liberation. It functions as well as the seed for the practice of right effort, the sixth factor of the noble eightfold path, by which we strive to abandon unwholesome impure mental states and to cultivate the wholesome and pure states. Devotion and reverence for the Triple Gem -- these become the seed for the germination of "unwavering confidence" *(aveccappasada),* the assurance of a noble disciple whose confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha can never be shaken by any outside force. In this way the simple act of going for refuge serves as the threefold seed for the development of the higher faculties of right understanding, right effort, and unshakable confidence. From this example we can again understand the taking of refuge to be very essential.

VI. The Methods of Going for Refuge

The methods of going for refuge divide into two general kinds: the superior or supramundane going for refuge and the common or mundane going for refuge. The supramundane going for refuge is the going for refuge of a superior person, that is, of an ariyan disciple who has reached the supramundane path leading irreversibly to nibbana. When such a person goes for refuge to the Triple Gem, his going for refuge is a superior refuge, unshakable and invincible. The ariyan person can never again, through the remainder of his future births (which amount to a maximum of only seven), go for refuge to any other teacher than the Buddha, to any other doctrine than the Dhamma, or to any other spiritual community than the Sangha. The Buddha says that the confidence such a disciple places in the Triple Gem cannot be shaken by anyone in the world, that it is firmly grounded and immovable.

The common way of going for refuges is the way in which ordinary persons, the vast majority below the ariyan plane, go for refuge to the Triple Gem. This can be subdivided into two types: the initial going for refuge and the recurrent going for refuge.

The initial going for refuge is the act of formally going for refuge for the first time. When a person has studied the basic principles of the Buddha's teaching, undertaken some of its practices, and become convinced of its value for his life, he may want to commit himself to the teaching by making an outer

profession of his conviction. Strictly speaking, as soon as there arises in his mind an act of consciousness which takes the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha as his guiding ideal, that person has gone for refuge to the Triple Gem and become a Buddhist lay disciple *(upasaka).* However, within the Buddhist tradition it is generally considered to be insufficient under normal circumstances to rest content with merely going for refuge by an internal act of dedication. If one has sincerely become convinced of the truth of the Buddha's teaching, and wishes to follow the teaching, it is preferable, when possible, to conform to the prescribed way of going for refuge that has come down in the Buddhist tradition. This way is to receive the three refuges from a bhikkhu, a Buddhist monk who has taken full ordination and remains in good standing in the monastic Order.

After one has decided to go for refuge, one should seek out a qualified monk -- one's own spiritual teacher or another respected member of the Order -- discuss one's intentions with him, and make arrangements for undergoing the ceremony. When the day arrives one should come to the monastery or temple bringing offerings such as candles, incense, and flowers for the shrine room and a small gift for the preceptor. After making the offerings one should, in the presence of the preceptor, join the palms together in respectful salutation *(anjali),* bow down three times before the image of the Buddha, and pay respects to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, as represented by the images and symbols in the shrine. Then, kneeling in front of the shrine, one should request the bhikkhu to give the three refuges. The bhikkhu will reply: "Repeat after me" and then recite:

> *Buddham saranam gacchami*
> I go for refuge to the Buddha;
> *Dhammam saranam gacchami*
> I go for refuge to the Dhamma;
> *Sangham saranam gacchami*
> I go for refuge to the Sangha.
>
> *Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami*
> A second time I go for refuge to the Buddha.
> *Dutiyampi Dhammam saranam gacchami*
> A second time I go for refuge to the Dhamma.
> *Dutiyampi Sangham saranam gacchami*
> A second time I go for refuge to the Sangha.
>
> *Tatiyampi Buddham saranam gacchami*
> A third time I go for refuge to the Buddha.
> *Tatiyampi Dhammam saranam gacchami*
> A third time I go for refuge to the Dhamma.
> *Tatiyampi Sangham saranam gacchami*
> A third time I go for refuge to the Sangha.

The candidate should repeat each line after the bhikkhu. At the end the bhikkhu will say:

Saranagamanam sampunnam "The going for refuge is completed." With this one formally becomes a lay follower of the Buddha, and remains such so long as the going for refuge stands intact. But to make the going for refuge especially strong and definitive, the candidate may confirm his acceptance of the refuge by declaring to the monk: "Venerable sir, please accept me as a lay disciple gone for refuge from this day forth until the end of my life." This phrase is added to show one's resolution to hold to the three refuges as one's guiding ideal for the rest of one's life. Following the declaration of the refuges, the bhikkhu will usually administer the five precepts, the ethical observances of abstaining from taking life, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants. These will be discussed in subsequent articles.

By undergoing the formal ceremony of taking refuge one openly embraces the teaching of the Buddha and becomes for the first time a self-declared follower of the Master. However, going for refuge should not be an event which occurs only once in a lifetime and then is allowed to fade into the background. Going for refuge is a method of cultivation, a practice of inner development which should be undertaken regularly, repeated and renewed every day as part of one's daily routine. Just as we care for our body by washing it each morning, so we should also take care of our mind by implanting in it each day the fundamental seed for our development along the Buddhist path, that is, the going for refuge. Preferably the going for refuge should be done twice each day, with each refuge repeated three times; but if a second recitation is too difficult to fit in, as a minimum one recitation should be done every day, with three repetitions of each refuge.

The daily undertaking of the refuges is best done in a shrine room or before a household altar with a Buddha-image. The actual recitation should be preceded by the offering of candles, incense, and possibly flowers. After making the offerings one should make three salutations before the Buddha-image and then remain kneeling with the hands held out palms joined. Before actually reciting the refuge formula it may be helpful to visualize to oneself the three objects of refuge arousing the feeling that one is in their presence. To represent the Buddha one can visualize an inspiring picture or statue of the Master. The Dhamma can be represented by visualizing, in front of the Buddha, three volumes of scripture to symbolize the Tipitaka, the three collections of Buddhist scriptures. The Dhamma can also be represented by the *dhammacakka,* the "wheel of Dhamma," with its eight spokes symbolizing the noble eightfold path converging upon nibbana at the hub; it should be bright and beautiful, radiating a golden light. To represent the Sangha one can visualize on either side of the Buddha the two chief disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana; alternatively, one can visualize around the Buddha a group of monks, all of them adepts of the teaching, arahats who have conquered the defilements and reached perfect emancipation.

Generating deep faith and confidence, while retaining the visualized images before one's inner eye, one should recite the refuge-formula three times with feeling and conviction. If one is undertaking the practice of meditation it is especially important to recite the refuge-formula before beginning the practice, for this gives needed inspiration to sustain the endeavor through the difficulties that may be encountered along the way. For this reason those who undertake intensive meditation and go off into solitude preface their practice, not with the usual method of recitation, but with a special variation: *Aham attanam Buddhassa niyyatemi Dhammassa Sanghassa,* "My person I surrender to the Buddha,

Dhamma, and Sangha." By surrendering his person and life to the Triple Gem the yogin shields himself against the obstacles which might arise to impede his progress and safeguards himself against egoistic clinging to the attainments he might reach. However, this variation on the refuge-formula should not be undertaken lightly, as its consequences are very serious. For ordinary purposes it is enough to use the standard formula for daily recitation.

VII. Corruptions and Breach of the Refuge

Corruptions of the refuge are factors that make the going for refuge impure, insincere, and ineffective. According to the commentaries there are three factors that defile the going for refuge -- ignorance, doubt, and wrong views. If one does not understand the reasons for going for refuge, the meaning of taking refuge, or the qualities of the refuge-objects, this lack of understanding is a form of ignorance which corrupts the going for refuge. Doubt corrupts the refuge insofar as the person overcome by doubt cannot settle confidence firmly in the Triple Gem. His commitment to the refuge is tainted by inner perplexity, suspicion, and indecision. The defilement of wrong views means a wrong understanding of the act of refuge or the refuge-objects. A person holding wrong views goes for refuge with the thought that the refuge act is a sufficient guarantee of deliverance; or he believes that the Buddha is a god with the power to save him, or that the Dhamma teaches the existence of an eternal self, or that the Sangha functions as an intercessory body with the ability to mediate his salvation. Even though the refuge act is defiled by these corruptions, as long as a person regards the Triple Gem as his supreme reliance his going for refuge is intact and he remains a Buddhist follower. But though the refuge is intact, his attitude of taking refuge is defective and has to be purified. Such purification can come about if he meets a proper teacher to give him instruction and help him overcome his ignorance, doubts, and wrong views.

The *breach* of the refuge means the breaking or violation of the commitment to the threefold refuge. A breach of the refuge occurs when a person who has gone for refuge comes to regard some counterpart to the three refuges as his guiding ideal or supreme reliance. If he comes to regard another spiritual teacher as superior to the Buddha, or as possessing greater spiritual authority than the Buddha, then his going for refuge to the Buddha is broken. If he comes to regard another religious teaching as superior to the Dhamma, or resorts to some other system of practice as his means to deliverance, then his going for refuge to the Dhamma is broken. If he comes to regard some spiritual community other than the ariyan Sangha as endowed with supramundane status, or as occupying a higher spiritual level than the ariyan Sangha, then his going for refuge to the Sangha is broken. In order for the refuge-act to remain valid and intact, the Triple Gem must be recognized as the exclusive resort for ultimate deliverance: "For me there is no other refuge, the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are my supreme refuge."[4]

Breaking the commitment to any of the three refuge-objects breaks the commitment to all of them, since the effectiveness of the refuge-act requires the recognition of the interdependence and inseparability of the three. Thus by adopting an attitude which bestows the status of a supreme reliance upon anything outside the Triple Gem, one cuts off the going for refuge and relinquishes one's claim to be a disciple of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.[5] In order to become valid once again the going for refuge must be

renewed, preferably by confessing one's lapse and then by once more going through the entire formal ceremony of taking refuge.

VIII. The Similes for the Refuges

In the traditional Indian method of exposition no account or treatment of a theme is considered complete unless it has been illustrated by similes. Therefore we conclude this explanation of going for refuge with a look at some of the classical similes for the objects of refuge. Though many beautiful similes are given in the texts, from fear of prolixity we here limit ourselves to four.

The first simile compares the Buddha to the sun, for his appearance in the world is like the sun rising over the horizon. His teaching of the true Dhamma is like the net of the sun's rays spreading out over the earth, dispelling the darkness and cold of the night, giving warmth and light to all beings. The Sangha is like the beings for whom the darkness of night has been dispelled, who go about their affairs enjoying the warmth and radiance of the sun.

The second simile compares the Buddha to the full moon, the jewel of the night-time sky. His teaching of the Dhamma is like the moon shedding its beams of light over the world, cooling off the heat of the day. The Sangha is like the persons who go out in the night to see and enjoy the refreshing splendor of the moonlight.

In the third simile the Buddha is likened to a great raincloud spreading out across the countryside at a time when the land has been parched with a long summer's heat. The teaching of the true Dhamma is like the downpour of the rain, which inundates the land giving water to the plants and vegetation. The Sangha is like the plants -- the trees, shrubs, bushes, and grass -- which thrive and flourish when nourished by the rain pouring down from the cloud.

The fourth simile compares the Buddha to a lotus flower, the paragon of beauty and purity. Just as a lotus grows up in a muddy lake, but rises above the water and stands in full splendor unsoiled by the mud, so the Buddha, having grown up in the world, overcomes the world and abides in its midst untainted by its impurities. The Buddha's teaching of the true Dhamma is like the sweet perfumed fragrance emitted by the lotus flower, giving delight to all. And the Sangha is like the host of bees who collect around the lotus, gather up the pollen, and fly off to their hives to transform it into honey.

Taking the Precepts

Going for refuge to the Triple Gem -- the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha -- is the door of entrance to the Buddha's teaching. To enter the teaching we have to pass through this door, but once we have made the initial commitment by taking refuge it is necessary to go further and to put the teaching

into actual practice. For the Buddha's teaching is not a system of salvation by faith. It is essentially a path leading to nibbana, the end of suffering. At the outset we need a certain degree of faith as the incentive for entering the path, but progress towards the goal depends primarily upon our own energy and intelligence in following the path through each of its successive stages. The teaching takes the attainment of deliverance away from every external resort and places it into our own hands. We have to realize the goal for ourselves, within ourselves, by working upon ourselves with the guidance of the Buddha's instructions.

The path of liberation that the Buddha points to is the threefold training in moral discipline *(sila),* concentration *(samadhi),* and wisdom *(pañña).* These three divisions of the path rise up each in dependence upon its predecessor -- concentration upon moral discipline and wisdom upon concentration. The foundation for the entire path, it can be seen, is the training in moral discipline. Because this first section of the path plays such a pivotal role it is vitally important for the serious practitioner to obtain a clear understanding of its essential meaning and the way it is to be practiced. To aid the development of such an understanding we here present an explanation of the training in sila or moral discipline, giving special attention to its most basic form as the observance of the five precepts *(pañcasila).* The subject will be dealt with under the following headings: (I) the essential meaning of sila; (II) the five precepts individually explained; (III) the eight precepts; (IV) the benefits of sila; (V) the undertaking of sila; (VI) the breach of sila; and (VII) the similes for sila.

I. The Essential Meaning of Sila

The Pali word for moral discipline, *sila,* has three levels of meaning: (1) inner virtue, i.e., endowment with such qualities as kindness, contentment, simplicity, truthfulness, patience, etc.; (2) virtuous actions of body and speech which express those inner virtues outwardly; and (3) rules of conduct governing actions of body and speech designed to bring them into accord with the ethical ideals. These three levels are closely intertwined and not always distinguishable in individual cases. But if we isolate them, sila as inner virtue can be called the aim of the training in moral discipline, sila as purified actions of body and speech the manifestation of that aim, and sila as rules of conduct the systematic means of actualizing the aim. Thus sila as inner virtue is established by bringing our bodily and verbal actions into accord with the ethical ideals, and this is done by following the rules of conduct intended to give these ideals concrete form.

The Buddhist texts explain that sila has the characteristic of harmonizing our actions of body and speech. Sila harmonizes our actions by bringing them into accord with our own true interests, with the well-being of others, and with universal laws. Actions contrary to sila lead to a state of self-division marked by guilt, anxiety, and remorse. But the observance of the principles of sila heals this division, bringing our inner faculties together into a balanced and centered state of unity. Sila also brings us into harmony with other men. While actions undertaken in disregard of ethical principles lead to relations scarred by competitiveness, exploitation, and aggression, actions intended to embody such principles promote concord between man and man -- peace, cooperation, and mutual respect. The harmony achieved by maintaining sila does not stop at the social level, but leads our actions into harmony with a

higher law -- the law of kamma, of action and its fruit, which reigns invisibly behind the entire world of sentient existence.

The need to internalize ethical virtue as the foundation for the path translates itself into a set of precepts established as guidelines to good conduct. The most basic set of precepts found in the Buddha's teaching is the *pañcasila,* the five presents, consisting of the following five training rules:

(1) the training rule of abstaining from taking life;

(2) the training rule of abstaining from taking what is not given;

(3) the training rule of abstaining from sexual misconduct;

(4) the training rule of abstaining from false speech; and

(5) the training rule of abstaining from fermented and distilled intoxicants which are the basics for heedlessness.

These five precepts are the minimal ethical code binding on the Buddhist laity. They are administered regularly by the monks to the lay disciples at almost every service and ceremony, following immediately upon the giving of the three refuges. They are also undertaken afresh each day by earnest lay Buddhists as part of their daily recitation.

The precepts function as the core of the training in moral discipline. They are intended to produce, through methodical practice, that inner purity of will and motivation which comes to expression as virtuous bodily and verbal conduct. Hence the equivalent term for precept, *sikkhapada,* which means literally "factor of training," that is, a factor of the training in moral discipline. However, the formulation of ethical virtue in terms of rules of conduct meets with an objection reflecting an attitude that is becoming increasingly widespread. This objection, raised by the ethical generalist, calls into question the need to cast ethics into the form of specific rules. It is enough, it is said, simply to have good intentions and to let ourselves be guided by our intuition as to what is right and wrong. Submitting to rules of conduct is at best superfluous, but worse tends to lead to a straightjacket conception of morality, to a constricting and legalistic system of ethics.

The Buddhist reply is that while moral virtue admittedly cannot be equated flatly with any set of rules, or with outward conduct conforming to rules, the rules are still of value for aiding the development of inner virtue. Only the very exceptional few can alter the stuff of their lives by a mere act of will. The overwhelming majority of men have to proceed more slowly, with the help of a set of stepping stones to help them gradually cross the rough currents of greed, hatred, and delusion. If the process of self-transformation which is the heart of the Buddhist path begins with moral discipline, then the concrete manifestation of this discipline is in the lines of conduct represented by the five precepts, which call for our adherence as expedient means to self-transformation. The precepts are not commandments imposed

from without, but principles of training each one takes upon himself through his own initiative and endeavors to follow with awareness and understanding. The formulas for the precepts do not read: "Thou shalt abstain from this and that." They read: "I undertake the training rule to abstain from the taking of life," etc. The emphasis here, as throughout the entire path, is on self-responsibility.

The precepts engender virtuous dispositions by a process involving the substitution of opposites. The actions prohibited by the precepts -- killing, stealing, adultery, etc. -- are all motivated by unwholesome mental factors called in Buddhist terminology the "defilements" *(kilesa).* By engaging in these actions knowingly and willingly we reinforce the grip of the defilements upon the mind to the point where they become our dominant traits. But when we take up the training by observing the precepts we then put a brake upon the current of unwholesome mental factors. There then takes place a process of "factor substitution" whereby the defilements are replaced by wholesome states which become increasingly more deeply ingrained as we go on with the training.

In this process of self-transformation the precepts draw their efficacy from another psychological principle, the law of development through repetition. Even though at first a practice arouses some resistance from within, if it is repeated over and over with understanding and determination, the qualities it calls into play pass imperceptibly into the makeup of the mind. We generally begin in the grip of negative attitudes, hemmed in by unskillful emotions. But if we see that these states lead to suffering and that to be free from suffering we must abandon them, then we will have sufficient motivation to take up the training designed to counter them. This training starts with the outer observance of sila, then proceeds to internalize self-restraint through meditation and wisdom. At the start to maintain the precepts may require special effort, but by degrees the virtuous qualities they embody will gather strength until our actions flow from them as naturally and smoothly as water from a spring.

The five precepts are formulated in accordance with the ethical algorithm of using oneself as the criterion for determining how to act in relation to others. In Pali the principle is expressed by the phrase *attanam upamam katva,* "consider oneself as similar to others and others as similar to oneself." The method of application involves a simple imaginative exchange of oneself and others. In order to decide whether or not to follow a particular line of action, we take ourselves as the standard and consider what would be pleasant and painful for ourselves. Then we reflect that others are basically similar to ourselves, and so, what is pleasant and painful to us is also pleasant and painful to them; thus just as we would not want others to cause pain for us, so we should not cause pain for others. As the Buddha explains:

> In this matter the noble disciple reflects: 'Here am I, fond of my life, not wanting to die, fond of pleasure and averse from pain. Suppose someone should deprive me of my life, it would not be a thing pleasing or delightful to me. If I, in my turn, were to deprive of his life one fond of life, not wanting to die, one fond of pleasure and averse from pain, it would not be a thing pleasing or delightful to him. For that state which is not pleasant or delightful to me must be not pleasant or delightful to another: and a state undear and unpleasing to me, how could I inflict that upon another?' As a result of such reflection he himself abstains from taking the life of creatures and he encourages others so to abstain,

and speaks in praise of so abstaining.

Samyuttanikaya, 55, No. 7

This deductive method the Buddha uses to derive the first four precepts. The fifth precept, abstaining from intoxicants, appears to deal only with my relation to myself, with what I put into my own body. However, because the violation of this precept can lead to the violation of all the other precepts and to much further harm for others, its social implications are deeper than is evident at first sight and bring it into range of this same method of derivation.

Buddhist ethics, as formulated in the five precepts, is sometimes charged with being entirely negative. It is criticized on the ground that it is a morality solely of avoidance lacking any ideals of positive action. Against this criticism several lines of reply can be given. First of all it has to be pointed out that the five precepts, or even the longer codes of precepts promulgated by the Buddha, do not exhaust the full range of Buddhist ethics. The precepts are only the most rudimentary code of moral training, but the Buddha also proposes other ethical codes inculcating definite positive virtues. The Mangala Sutta, for example, commends reverence, humility, contentment, gratitude, patience, generosity, etc. Other discourses prescribe numerous family, social, and political duties establishing the well being of society. And behind all these duties lie the four attitudes called the "immeasurables" -- loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

But turning to the five precepts themselves, some words have to be said in defense of their negative formulation. Each moral principle included in the precepts contains two aspects -- a negative aspect, which is a rule of abstinence, and a positive aspect, which is a virtue to be cultivated. These aspects are called, respectively, *varitta* (avoidance) and *caritta* (positive performance). Thus the first precept is formulated as abstaining from the destruction of life, which in itself is a *varitta,* a principle of abstinence. But corresponding to this, we also find in the descriptions of the practice of this precept a *caritta,* a positive quality to be developed, namely compassion. Thus in the suttas we read: "The disciple, abstaining from the taking of life, dwells without stick or sword, conscientious, full of sympathy, desirous of the welfare of all living beings." So corresponding to the negative side of abstaining from the destruction of life, there is the positive side of developing compassion and sympathy for all beings. Similarly, abstinence from stealing is paired with honesty and contentment, abstinence from sexual misconduct is paired with marital fidelity in the case of lay people and celibacy in the case of monks, abstinence from falsehood is pared with speaking the truth, and abstinence from intoxicants is paired with heedfulness.

Nevertheless, despite this recognition of a duality of aspect, the question still comes up: if there are two sides to each moral principle, why is the precept worded only as an abstinence? Why don't we also undertake training rules to develop positive virtues such as compassion, honesty, and so forth?

The answer to this is twofold. First, in order to develop the positive virtues we have to begin by abstaining from the negative qualities opposed to them. The growth of the positive virtues will only be

stunted or deformed as long as the defilements are allowed to reign unchecked. We cannot cultivate compassion while at the same time indulging in killing, or cultivate honesty while stealing and cheating. At the start we have to abandon the unwholesome through the aspect of avoidance. Only when we have secured a foundation in avoiding the unwholesome can we expect to succeed in cultivating the factors of positive performance. The process of purifying virtue can be compared to growing a flower garden on a plot of uncultivated land. We don't begin by planting the seeds in expectation of a bountiful yield. We have to start with the duller work of weeding out the garden and preparing the beds. Only after we have uprooted the weeds and nourished the soil can we plant the seeds in the confidence that the flowers will grow healthily.

Another reason why the precepts are worded in terms of abstinence is that the development of positive virtues cannot be prescribed by rules. Rules of training can govern what we have to avoid and perform in our outer actions but only ideals of aspiration, not rules, can govern what develops within ourselves. Thus we cannot take up a training rule to always be loving towards others. To impose such a rule is to place ourselves in a double bind since inner attitudes are just simply not so docile that they can be determined by command. Love and compassion are the fruits of the work we do on ourselves inwardly, not of assenting to a precept. What we can do is to undertake a precept to abstain from destroying life and from injuring other beings. Then we can make a resolution, preferably without much fanfare, to develop loving-kindness, and apply ourselves to the mental training designed to nourish its growth.

One more word should be added concerning the formulation of the precepts. Despite their negative wording, even in that form the precepts are productive of tremendous positive benefits for others as well as for oneself. The Buddha says that one who abstains from the destruction of life gives immeasurable safety and security to countless living beings. How the simple observance of a single precept leads to such a result is not immediately obvious but calls for some thought. Now by myself I can never give immeasurable safety and security to other beings by any program of positive action. Even if I were to go on protest against all the slaughterhouses in the world, or to march against war continuously without stopping, by such action I could never stop the slaughter of animals or ensure that war would come to an end. But when I adopt for myself the precept to abstain from the destruction of life, then by reason of the precept I do not intentionally destroy the life of any living being. Thus any other being can feel safe and secure in my presence; all beings are ensured that they will never meet harm from me. Of course even then I can never ensure that other living beings will be absolutely immune from harm and suffering, but this is beyond anyone's power. All that lies within my power and the sphere of my responsibility are the attitudes and actions that emanate from myself towards others. And as long as these are circumscribed by the training rule to abstain from taking life, no living being need feel threatened in my presence, or fear that harm and suffering will come from me.

The same principle applies to the other precepts. When I undertake the precept to abstain from taking what is not given, no one has reason to fear that I will steal what belongs to him; the belongings of all other beings are safe from me. When I undertake the precept to abstain from sexual misconduct, no one has reason to fear that I will try to transgress against his wife. When I undertake the precept to abstain from falsehood, then anyone who speaks with me can be confident that they will hear the truth; my word can be regarded as trustworthy and reliable even in matters of critical importance. And because I

undertake the precept of abstaining from intoxicants, then one can be assured that the crimes and transgression that result from intoxication will never be committed by myself. In this way, by observing the five precepts I give immeasurable safety and security to countless beings simply through these five silent but powerful determinations established in the mind.

II. The Five Precepts

1. The First Precept: Abstinence from Taking Life

The first of the five precepts reads in Pali, *Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami;* in English, "I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking life." Here the word *pana,* meaning that which breathes, denotes any living being that has breath and consciousness. It includes animals and insects as well as men, but does not include plants as they have only life but not breath or consciousness. The word "living being" is a conventional term, an expression of common usage, signifying in the strict philosophical sense the life faculty *(jivitindriya).* The word *atipata* means literally striking down, hence killing or destroying. Thus the precept enjoins abstinence *(veramani)* from the taking of life. Though the precept's wording prohibits the killing of living beings, in terms of its underlying purpose it can also be understood to prohibit injuring, maiming, and torturing as well.

The Pali Buddhist commentaries formally define the act of taking life thus: "The taking of life is the volition of killing expressed through the doors of either body or speech, occasioning action which results in the cutting off of the life faculty in a living being, when there is a living being present and (the perpetrator of the act) perceives it as a living being"[6]

The first important point to note in this definition is that the act of taking life is defined as a volition *(cetana).* Volition is the mental factor responsible for action *(kamma);* it has the function of arousing the entire mental apparatus for the purpose of accomplishing a particular aim, in this case, the cutting off of the life faculty of a living being. The identification of the transgression with volition implies that the ultimate responsibility for the act of killing lies with the mind, since the volition that brings about the act is a mental factor. The body and speech function merely as doors for that volition, i.e., as channels through which the volition of taking life reaches expression. Killing is classified as a bodily deed since it generally occurs via the body, but what really performs the act of killing is the mind using the body as the instrument for actualizing its aim.

A second important point to note is that killing need not occur directly through the body. The volition to take life can also express itself through the door of speech. This means that the command to take life, given to others by way of words, writing, or gesture, is also considered a case of killing. One who issues such a commend becomes responsible for the action as soon as it achieves its intention of depriving a being of life.

A complete act of killing constituting a full violation of the precept involves five factors: (1) a living

being; (2) the perception of the living being as such; (3) the thought or volition of killing; (4) the appropriate effort; and (5) the actual death of the being as a result of the action. The second factor ensures that responsibility for killing is incurred only when the perpetrator of the act is aware that the object of his action is a living being. Thus if we step on an insect we do not see, the precept is not broken because the perception or awareness of a living being is lacking. The third factor ensures that the taking of life is intentional. Without the factor of volition there is no transgression, as when we kill a fly while intending simply to drive it away with our hand. The fourth factor holds that the action must be directed to the taking of life, the fifth that the being dies as a result of this action. If the life faculty is not cut off, a full violation of the precept is not incurred, though in harming or injuring living beings in any way its essential purpose will be violated.

The taking of life is distinguished into different types by way of its underlying motivation. One criterion for determining the motivation is the defilement principally responsible for the action. Acts of killing can originate from all three unwholesome roots -- from greed, hatred, and delusion. As the immediate cause concomitant with the act of killing, hatred together with delusion functions as the root since the force which drives the act is the impulse to destroy the creature's life, a form of hatred. Any of the three unwholesome roots, however, can serve as the impelling cause or decisive support *(upanissaya paccaya)* for the act, operating over some span of time. Though greed and hatred are always mutually exclusive at a single moment, the two can work together at different moments over an extended period to occasion the taking of life. Killing motivated primarily by greed is seen in such cases as killing in order to gain material benefits or high status for oneself, to eliminate threats to one's comfort and security, or to obtain enjoyment as in hunting and fishing for sport. Killing motivated by hatred is evident in cases of vicious murder where the motive is strong aversion, cruelty, or jealousy. And killing motivated by delusion can be seen in the case of those who perform animal sacrifices in the belief that they are spiritually wholesome or who kill followers of other religions with the view that this is a religious duty.

Acts of taking life are differentiated by way of their degree of moral gravity. Not all cases of killing are equally blameworthy. All are unwholesome, a breach of the precept, but the Buddhist texts make a distinction in the moral weight attached to different kinds of killing.

The first distinction given is that between killing beings with moral qualities *(guna)* and killing beings without moral qualities. For all practical purposes the former are human beings, the latter animals, and it is held that to kill a fellow human being is a more serious matter ethically than to kill an animal. Then within each category further distinctions are drawn. In the case of animals the degree of moral gravity is said to be proportional to the animal, to kill a larger animal being more blameworthy than to kill a smaller one. Other factors relevant to determining moral weight are whether the animal has an owner or is ownerless, whether it is domestic or wild, and whether it has a gentle or a vicious temperament. The moral gravity would be greater in the former three alternatives, less in the latter three. In the killing of human beings the degree of moral blame depends on the personal qualities of the victim, to kill a person of superior spiritual stature or one's personal benefactors being more blameworthy than to kill a less developed person or one unrelated to oneself. The three cases of killing selected as the most culpable are matricide, parricide, and the murder of an arahat, a fully purified saint.

Another factor determinative of moral weight is the motivation of the act. This leads to a distinction between premeditated murder and impulsive killing. The former is murder in cold blood, intended and planned in advance, driven either by strong greed or strong hatred. The latter is killing which is not planned in advance, as when one person kills another in a fit of rage or in self-defense. Generally, premeditated murder is regarded as a graver transgression than impulsive killing, and the motivation of hatred as more blameworthy than the motivation of greed. The presence of cruelty and the obtaining of sadistic pleasure from the act further increase its moral weight.

Other factors determinative of moral gravity are the force of the defilements accompanying the act and the amount of effort involved in its perpetration, but limitations of space prohibit a full discussion of their role.

2. The Second Precept: Abstinence from Taking What Is Not Given

The second precept reads: *Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami,* "I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking what is not given." The word *adinna,* meaning literally "what is not given," signifies the belongings of another person over which he exercises ownership legally and blamelessly *(adandaraho anupavajjo).* Thus no offense is committed if the article taken has no owner, e.g., if logs are taken to make a fire or stones are gathered to build a wall. Further, the other person has to have possession of the article taken legally and blamelessly; that is, he has to have the legal right over the article and also has to be blameless in his use of it. This latter phrase apparently becomes applicable in cases where a person gains legal possession of an article but does so in an improper way or uses it for unethical purposes. In such cases there might be legitimate grounds for depriving him of the item, as when the law requires someone who commits a misdemeanor to pay a fine or deprives a person of some weapon rightfully his which he is using for destructive purposes.

The act of taking what is not given is formally defined thus: "Taking what is not given is the volition with thievish intent arousing the activity of appropriating an article belonging to another legally and blamelessly in one who perceives it as belonging to another."[7] As in the case of the first precept the transgression here consists ultimately in a volition. This volition can commit the act of theft by originating action through body or speech; thus a transgression is incurred either by taking something directly by oneself or else indirectly, by commanding someone else to appropriate the desired article. The fundamental purpose of the precept is to protect the property of individuals from unjustified confiscation by others. Its ethical effect is to encourage honesty and right livelihood.

According to the commentaries, for a complete breach of the precept to be committed five factors must be present: (1) an article belonging to another legally and blamelessly; (2) the perception of it as belonging to another; (3) the thought or intention of stealing; (4) the activity of taking the article; and (5) the actual appropriation of the article. By reason of the second factor there is no violation in taking another's article if we mistakenly perceive it as our own, as when we might confuse identical-looking coats, umbrellas, etc. The third factor again provides a safeguard against accidental appropriation, while

the fifth asserts that to fall into the class of a transgression the action must deprive the owner of his article. It is not necessary that he be aware that his possession is missing, only that it be removed from his sphere of control even if only momentarily.

Taking what is not given can be divided into many different kinds of violation. We might mention some of the most prominent. One is *stealing,* that is, taking what is not given, secretly, without the knowledge of the owner, as in housebreaking, a midnight bank theft, pickpocketing, etc. Another type is *robbery,* taking what is not given by force, either by snatching someone's belongings away from him or by compelling him to hand them over by means of threats. A third type is *fraudulence,* laying false claims or telling lies in order to gain someone else's possessions. Still another is *deceit,* using deceptive means to deprive someone of an article or to gain his money as when storekeepers use false weights and measures or when people produce counterfeit bills for use.

The violation of this precept need not amount to a major crime. The precept is subtle and offers many opportunities for its breach, some of them seemingly slight. For example, transgression will be incurred when employees take goods belonging to their employers, pocketing small items to which they have no right with the thought that the company will not miss them; when using another's telephone to make long-distance calls without his consent, letting him cover the bill; in bringing articles into a country without declaring them to customs in order to avoid paying duty on them; in idling away time on the job for which one is being paid in the expectation that one has been working diligently; in making one's employees work without giving them adequate compensation, etc.

By way of its underlying roots, the act of taking what is not given can proceed either from greed or hatred, both being coupled with delusion. Stealing by reason of greed is the obvious case, but the offense can also be driven by hatred. Hatred functions as the motive for stealing when one person deprives another of an article not so much because he wants it for himself as because he resents the other's possession of it and wants to make him suffer through its loss.

The degree of blame attached to acts of stealing is held to be determined by two principal factors, the value of the article taken and the moral qualities of the owner. In stealing a very valuable article the degree of blame is obviously greater than in stealing an article of little worth. But where the value of the article is the same the blameworthiness of the action still varies relative to the individual against whom the offense is committed. As determined by this factor, stealing from a person of high virtuous qualities or a personal benefactor is a more serious transgression than stealing from a person of lesser qualities or from an unrelated person. This factor, in fact, can be even more important than the cash value of the object. Thus if someone steals an almsbowl from a meditative monk, who needs the bowl to collect his food, the moral weight of the act is heavier than that involved in cheating a racketeer out of several thousand dollars, owing to the character of the person affected by the deed. The motivation behind the action and the force of the defilements are also determinative of the degree of moral gravity, hatred being considered more culpable than greed.

3. The Third Precept: Abstinence from Misconduct in regard to Sense Pleasures

The third precept reads: *Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami,* "I undertake the training rule to abstain from misconduct in regard to sense pleasures." The word *kama* has the general meaning of sense pleasure or sensual desire, but the commentaries explain it as sexual relations *(methunasamacara),* an interpretation supported by the suttas. *Micchacara* means wrong modes of conduct. Thus the precept enjoins abstinence from improper or illicit sexual relations.

Misconduct is regard to sense pleasures is formally defined as "the volition with sexual intent occurring through the bodily door, causing transgression with an illicit partner".[8] The primary question this definition elicits is: who is to qualify as an illicit partner? For men, the text lists twenty types of women who are illicit partners. These can be grouped into three categories: (1) a woman who is under the protection of elders or other authorities charged with her care, e.g., a girl being cared for by parents, by an older brother or sister, by other relatives, or by the family as a whole; (2) a woman who is prohibited by convention, that is, close relatives forbidden under family tradition, nuns and other women vowed to observe celibacy as a spiritual discipline, and those forbidden as partners under the law of the land; and (3) a woman who is married or engaged to another man, even one bound to another man only by a temporary agreement. In the case of women, for those who are married any man other than a husband is an illicit partner. For all women a man forbidden by tradition or under religious rules is prohibited as a partner. For both men and women any violent, forced, or coercive union, whether by physical compulsion or psychological pressure, can be regarded as a transgression of the precept even when the partner is not otherwise illicit. But a man or woman who is widowed or divorced can freely remarry according to choice.

The texts mention four factors which must be present for a breach of the precept to be incurred: (1) an illicit partner, as defined above; (2) the thought or volition of engaging in sexual union with that person; (3) the act of engaging in union; and (4) the acceptance of the union. This last factor is added for the purpose of excluding from violation those who are unwillingly forced into improper sexual relations.

The degree of moral gravity involved in the offense is determined by the force of the lust motivating the action and the qualities of the person against whom the transgression is committed. If the transgression involves someone of high spiritual qualities, the lust is strong, and force is used, the blame is heavier than when the partner has less developed qualities, the lust is weak, and no force is used. The most serious violations are incest and the rape of an arahat (or arahatess). The underlying root is always greed accompanied by delusion.

4. The Fourth Precept: Abstinence from False Speech

The fourth precept reads: *Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami,* "I undertake the training rule to abstain from false speech." False speech is defined as "the wrong volition with intent to deceive, occurring through the door of either body or speech, arousing the bodily or verbal effort of deceiving

another."[9] The transgression must be understood as intentional. The precept is not violated merely by speaking what is false, but by speaking what is false with the intention of representing that as true; thus it is equivalent to lying or deceptive speech. The volition is said to arouse bodily or verbal action. The use of speech to deceive is obvious, but the body too can be used as an instrument of communication -- as in writing, hand signals, and gestures -- and thus can be used to deceive others.

Four factors enter into the offense of false speech: (1) an untrue state of affairs; (2) the intention of deceiving another; (3) the effort to express that, either verbally or bodily; and (4) the conveying of a false impression to another. Since intention is required, if one speaks falsely without aiming at deceiving another, as when one speaks what is false believing it to be true, there is no breach of the precept. Actual deception, however, is not needed for the precept to be broken. It is enough if the false impression is communicated to another. Even though he does not believe the false statement, if one expresses what is false to him and he understands what is being said, the transgression of speaking falsehood has been committed. The motivation for false speech can be any of the three unwholesome roots. These yield three principal kinds of falsehood: (1) false speech motivated by greed, intended to increase one's gains or promote one's status or that of those dear to oneself; (2) false speech motivated by hatred, intended to destroy the welfare of others or to bring them harm and suffering; and (3) false speech of a less serious kind, motivated principally by delusion in association with less noxious degrees of greed or hatred, intended neither to bring special benefits to oneself nor to harm others. Some examples would be lying for the sake of a joke, exaggerating an account to make it more interesting, speaking flattery to gratify others, etc.

The principal determinants of the gravity of the transgression are the recipient of the lie, the object of the lie and the motivation of the lie. The recipient is the person to whom the lie is told. The moral weight of the act is proportional to the character of this person, the greatest blame attaching to falsehoods spoken to one's benefactors or to spiritually developed persons. The moral weight again varies according to the object of the lie, the person the lie affects, being proportional to his spiritual qualities and his relation to oneself in the same way as with the recipient. And thirdly, the gravity of the lie is contingent on its motivation, the most serious cases being those with malicious intent designed to destroy the welfare of others. The worst cases of false speech are lying in a way that defames the Buddha or an arahat, and making false claims to have reached a superior spiritual attainment in order to increase one's own gains and status. In the case of a bhikkhu this latter offense can lead to expulsion from the Sangha.

5. The Fifth Precept: Abstinence from Intoxicating Drinks and Drugs

The fifth precept reads: *Suramerayamajjapamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami,* "I undertake the training rule to abstain from fermented and distilled intoxicants which are the basis for heedlessness." The word *meraya* means fermented liquors, *sura* liquors which have been distilled to increase their strength and flavor. The world *majja,* meaning an intoxicant, can be related to the rest of the passage either as qualified by *surameraya* or as additional to them. In the former case the whole phrase means fermented and distilled liquors which are intoxicants, in the latter it means fermented and distilled liquors and other intoxicants. If this second reading is adopted the precept would explicitly

include intoxicating drugs used non-medicinally, such as the opiates, hemp, and psychedelics. But even on the first reading the precept implicitly proscribes these drugs by way of its guiding purpose, which is to prevent heedlessness caused by the taking of intoxicating substances.

The taking of intoxicants is defined as the volition leading to the bodily act of ingesting distilled or fermented intoxicants.[10] It can be committed only by one's own person (not by command to others) and only occurs through the bodily door. For the precept to be violated four factors are required: (1) the intoxicant; (2) the intention of taking it; (3) the activity of ingesting it; and (4) the actual ingestion of the intoxicant. The motivating factor of the violation is greed coupled with delusion. No gradations of moral weight are given. In taking medicines containing alcohol or intoxicating drugs for medical reasons no breach of the precept is committed. There is also no violation in taking food containing a negligible amount of alcohol added as a flavoring.

This fifth precept differs from the preceding four in that the others directly involve a man's relation to his fellow beings while this precept ostensibly deals solely with a person's relation to himself -- to his own body and mind. Thus whereas the first four precepts clearly belong to the moral sphere, a question may arise whether this precept is really ethical in character or merely hygienic. The answer is that it is ethical, for the reason that what a person does to his own body and mind can have a decisive effect on his relations to his fellow men. Taking intoxicants can influence the ways in which a man interacts with others, leading to the violation of all five precepts. Under the influence of intoxicants a man who might otherwise be restrained can lose self-control, become heedless, and engage in killing, stealing, adultery, and lying. Abstinence from intoxicants is prescribed on the grounds that it is essential to the self-protection of the individual and for establishing the well-being of family and society. The precept thus prevents the misfortunes that result from the use of intoxicants: loss of wealth, quarrels and crimes, bodily disease, loss of reputation, shameless conduct, negligence, and madness.

The precept, it must be stressed, does not prohibit merely intoxication but the very use of intoxicating substances. Though occasional indulgences may not be immediately harmful in isolation, the seductive and addictive properties of intoxicants are well known. The strongest safeguard against the lure is to avoid them altogether.

III. The Eight Precepts

Beyond the five precepts Buddhism offers a higher code of moral discipline for the laity consisting of eight precepts *(atthasila).* This code of eight precepts is not entirely different in content from the fivefold code, but includes the five precepts with one significant revision. The revision comes in the third precept, where abstaining from sexual misconduct is changed to abstaining from incelibacy. The third precept of the eightfold set thus reads: Abrahmacariya veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami, "I undertake the training rule to abstain from incelibacy." To these basic five three further precepts are added:

(6) *Vikalabhojana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami,* "I undertake the training rule to abstain from eating beyond the time limit," i.e., from mid-day to the following dawn.

(7) *Nacca gita vadita visukhadassana-mala gandha vilepana dharanamandana vibhusanatthana veramani sikkhapadam samamadiyami,* "I undertake the training rule to abstain from dancing, singing, instrumental music, unsuitable shows, and from wearing garlands, using scents, and beautifying the body with cosmetics."

(8) *Uccasayana mahasayana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami,* "I undertake the training rule to abstain from high and luxurious beds and seats."

There are two ways in which these precepts are observed -- permanently and temporarily. Permanent observance, far the less common of the two, is undertaken generally by older people who, having completed their family duties, wish to deepen their spiritual development by devoting the later years of their life to intensified spiritual practice. Even then it is not very widespread. Temporary observance is usually undertaken by lay people either on Uposatha days or on occasions of a meditation retreat. Uposatha days are the new moon and full moon days of the lunar month, which are set aside for special religious observances, a custom absorbed into Buddhism from ancient Indian custom going back even into the pre-Buddhistic period of Indian history. On these days lay people in Buddhist countries often take the eight precepts, especially when they go to spend the Uposatha at a temple or monastery. On these occasions the undertaking of the eight precepts lasts for a day and a night. Then, secondly, on occasions of retreat lay people take the eight precepts for the duration of their retreat, which might last anywhere from several days to several months.

The formulation of two distinct ethical codes follows from the two basic purposes of the Buddhist moral discipline. One is the fundamental ethical purpose of putting a brake on immoral actions, actions which are harmful either directly or indirectly to others. This purpose falls into the province of the fivefold code of precepts, which deals with the restraint of actions that cause pain and suffering to others. In enjoining abstinence from these unwholesome actions, the five precepts also protect the individual from their undesirable repercussions on himself -- some immediately visible in this present life, some coming to manifestation only in future lives when the kamma they generate bears its fruit.

The other purpose of the Buddhist training in moral discipline is not so much ethical as spiritual. It is to provide a system of self-discipline which can act as a basis for achieving higher states of realization through the practice of meditation. In serving this purpose the code functions as a kind of ascesis, a way of conduct involving self-denial and renunciation as essential to the ascent to higher levels of consciousness. This ascent, culminating in nibbana or final liberation from suffering, hinges upon the attenuation and ultimate eradication of craving, which with its multiple branches of desire is the primary force that holds us in bondage. To reduce and overcome craving it is necessary to regulate not only the deleterious types of moral transgressions but also modes of conduct which are not harmful to others but sill give vent to the craving that holds us in subjection.

The Buddhist code of discipline expounded in the eight precepts represents the transition from the first level of moral discipline to the second, that is, from sila as a purely moral undertaking to sila as a way of ascetic self-training aimed at progress along the path to liberation. The five precepts also fulfill this function to some extent, but they do so only in a limited way, not as fully as the eight precepts. With the eight precepts the ethical code takes a pronounced turn towards the control of desires which are not socially harmful and immoral. This extension of the training focuses upon desires centering around the physical body and its concerns. The change of the third precept to abstinence from incelibacy curbs the sexual urge, regarded in itself not as a moral evil but as a powerful expression of craving that has to be held in check to advance to the higher levels of meditation. The three new precepts regulate concern with food, entertainment, self-beautification, and physical comfort. Their observance nurtures the growth of qualities essential to the deeper spiritual life -- contentment, fewness of wishes, modesty, austerity, renunciation. As these qualities mature the defilements are weakened, aiding the effort to reach attainment in serenity and insight.

IV. The Benefits of Sila

The benefits sila brings to the one who undertakes it can be divided into three classes: (1) the benefits pertaining to the present life; (2) the benefits pertaining to future lives; and (3) the benefit of the ultimate good. These we will discuss in turn.

1. Benefits pertaining to the present life.

At the most elementary level, the observance of the five precepts protects one from coming into trouble with the law, ensuring immunity from temporal punishment at least with regard to those actions covered by the precepts. Killing, stealing, adultery, bearing false testimony, and irresponsible behavior caused by drunkenness being offenses punishable by law, one who undertakes the five precepts avoids the penalties consequent upon these actions by abstaining from the actions which entail them.

Further temporal benefits accrue through the observance of the precepts. Following the precepts helps to establish a good reputation among the wise and virtuous. At a more inward level it leads to a clear conscience. Repeated violations of the basic principles of ethics, even if they escape detection, still tend to create a disturbed conscience -- the pain of guilt, uneasiness, and remorse. But maintaining the precepts results in freedom from remorse, an ease of conscience that can evolve into the "bliss of blamelessness" *(anavajjasukha)* when we review our actions and realize them to be wholesome and good. This clarity of conscience fosters another benefit -- the ability to die peacefully, without fear or confusion. At the time of death the various actions we have regularly performed in the course of life rise to the surface of the mind, casting up their images like pictures upon a screen. If unwholesome actions were prevalent their weight will predominate and cause fear at the approach of death, leading to a confused and painful end. But if wholesome actions were prevalent in the course of life the opposite will take place: when death comes we will be able to die calmly and peacefully.

2. Benefits pertaining to future lives.

According to the Buddha's teaching the mode of rebirth we take in our next existence is determined by our kamma, the willed actions we have performed in this present existence. The general principle governing the working of the rebirth process is that unwholesome kamma leads to an unfavorable rebirth, wholesome kamma to a favorable rebirth. More specifically, if the kamma built up by breaking the five precepts becomes the determining cause of the mode of rebirth it will conduce to rebirth in one of the four planes of misery -- the hells, the realm of tormented spirits, the animal world, or the world of the asuras. If, as a result of some wholesome kamma, a person who regularly breaks the five precepts should take rebirth as a human being, then when his unwholesome kamma matures it will produce pain and suffering in his human state. The forms this suffering takes correspond to the transgressions. Killing leads to a premature death, stealing to loss of wealth, sexual misconduct to enmity, false speech to being deceived and slandered by others, and the use of intoxicants to loss of intelligence.

The observance of the five precepts, on the other hand, brings about the accumulation of wholesome kamma tending to rebirth in the planes of happiness, i.e., in the human or heavenly worlds. This kamma again, coming to maturity in the course of the life, produces favorable results consonant in nature with the precepts. Thus abstaining from the taking of life leads to longevity, abstaining from stealing to prosperity, abstaining from sexual misconduct to popularity, abstaining from false speech to a good reputation, and abstaining from intoxicants to mindfulness and wisdom.

3. The benefits of the ultimate good.

The ultimate good is the attainment of nibbana, deliverance from the round of rebirths, which can be achieved either in the present life or in some future life depending on the maturity of our spiritual faculties. Nibbana is attained by practicing the path leading to deliverance, the noble eightfold path in its three stages of moral discipline, concentration, and wisdom. The most fundamental of these three stages is moral discipline or sila, which begins with the observance of the five precepts. The undertaking of the five precepts can thus be understood to be the first actual step taken along the path to deliverance and the indispensable foundation for the higher attainments in concentration and wisdom.

Sila functions as the foundation for the path in two ways. First the observance of sila promotes a clear conscience, essential to the development of concentration. If we often act contrary to the precepts our actions tend to give rise to remorse, which will swell up to the surface of the mind when we sit in meditation, creating restlessness and feelings of guilt. But if we act in harmony with the precepts our minds will be imbued with a bliss and clarity of conscience which allows concentration to develop easily. The observance of the precepts conduces to concentration in a second way: it rescues us from the danger of being caught in a crossfire of incompatible motives disruptive of the meditative frame of mind. The practice of meditation aimed at serenity and insight requires the stilling of the defilements. But when we deliberately act in violation of the precepts our actions spring from the unwholesome roots

of greed, hatred and delusion. Thus in committing such actions we are arousing the defilements while at the same time, when sitting in meditation, we are striving to overcome them. The result is inner conflict, disharmony, a split right through the center of our being obstructing the unification of the mind needed for meditative attainment.

At the outset we cannot expect to eliminate the subtle forms of the defilements all at once. These can only be tackled later, in the deeper stages of meditation. In the beginning we have to start by stopping the defilements in their coarser modes of occurrence, and this is achieved by restraining them from reaching expression through the channels of body and speech. Such restraint is the essence of sila. We therefore take up the precepts as a form of spiritual training, as a way of locking in the defilements and preventing them from outward eruptions. After they have been shut in and their effusions stopped we can then work on eliminating their roots through the development of concentration and wisdom.

V. The undertaking of Sila

The Buddhist tradition recognizes three distinct ways of observing the precepts. One is called immediate abstinence *(sampattavirati),* which means abstaining from unwholesome actions naturally through an ingrained sense of conscience resulting either from an innately keen ethical disposition or from education and training. The second is called abstinence through undertaking *(samadanavirati),* which means abstaining as a result of having undertaken rules of training with a determination to follow those rules as guidelines to right action. The third way is called abstinence through eradication *(samucchedavirati),* which means abstaining from the transgressions covered by the precepts as a result of having cut off the defilements out of which transgressions arise.

For purposes of self-training Buddhism emphasizes the importance of the second type of abstinence. Immediate abstinence is seen as praiseworthy in itself but not sufficient as a basis for training since it presupposes the prior existence of a strong conscience, which is not a reality in the overwhelming majority of men. In order to develop the mental strength to resist the upsurge of the defilements it is essential to undertake the precepts by a deliberate act of will and to form the determination to observe them diligently.

There are two ways of formally undertaking the five precepts, the initial and the recurrent, corresponding to the two ways of going for refuge. The initial undertaking takes place immediately after the initial going for refuge. When the aspirant receives the three refuges from a bhikkhu in a formal ceremony, this will then be followed by the administering of the five precepts, the monk reciting each of the precepts in turn and the lay disciple repeating them after him. If there is no monk available to administer the refuges and precepts, the aspirant can take them upon himself by a strong and fixed mental resolution, preferably doing so before an image of the Buddha. The presence of a monk is not necessary but is generally desired to give a sense of the continuity of the lineage.

The undertaking of the precepts is not a one-shot affair to be gone through once and then dropped off

into the storage bank of memories. Rather, like the going for refuge, the precepts should be undertaken repeatedly, preferably on a daily basis. This is the recurrent undertaking of the precepts. Just as the disciple repeats the three refuges each day to strengthen his commitment to the Dhamma, so he should recite the five precepts immediately after the refuges in order to express his determination to embody the Dhamma in his conduct. However, the practice of sila is not to be confused with the mere recitation of a verbal formula. The recitation of the formula helps reinforce one's will to carry out the training, but beyond all verbal recitations the precepts have to be put into practice in day-to-day life, especially on the occasions when they become relevant. Undertaking the precepts is like buying a ticket for a train: the purchase of the ticket permits us to board the train but does not take us anywhere by itself. Similarly, formally accepting the precepts enables us to embark upon the training, but after the acceptance we have to translate the precepts into action.

Once we have formed the initial determination to cultivate sila, there are certain mental factors which then help to protect our observance of the precepts. One of these is mindfulness *(sati).* Mindfulness is awareness, constant attention and keen observation. Mindfulness embraces all aspects of our being -- our bodily activities, our feelings, our states of mind, our objects of thought. With sharpened mindfulness we can be aware exactly what we are doing, what feelings and states of mind are impelling us towards particular courses of action, what thoughts form our motivations. Then, by means of this mindfulness, we can avoid the unwholesome and develop the wholesome.

Another factor which helps us maintain the precepts is understanding *(pañña).* The training in moral discipline should not be taken up as a blind dogmatic submission to external rules, but as a fully conscious process guided by intelligence. The factors of understanding give us that guiding intelligence. To observe the precepts properly we have to understand for ourselves which kinds of actions are wholesome and which are unwholesome. We also have to understand the reason why -- why they are wholesome and unwholesome, why the one should be pursued and the other abandoned. The deepening of understanding enables us to see the roots of our actions, i.e., the mental factors from which they spring, and the consequences to which they lead, their long-term effects upon ourselves and others. Understanding expands our vision not only into consequences, but also into alternatives, into the different courses of action offered by any objective situation. Thence it gives us knowledge of the various alternatives open to us and the wisdom to choose some in preference to others.

A third factor that helps in maintaining the precepts is energy *(viriya).*The training in right conduct is at base a way of training the mind, since it is the mind that directs our actions. But the mind cannot be trained without effort, without the application of energy to steer it into wholesome channels. Energy works together with mindfulness and understanding to bring about the gradual purification of sila. Through mindfulness we gain awareness of our states of mind; through understanding we can ascertain the tendencies of these states, their qualities, roots and consequences; then through energy we strive to abandon the unwholesome and to cultivate the wholesome.

The fourth factor conducive to the training in sila is patience *(khanti).* Patience enables us to endure the offensive actions of others without becoming angry or seeking retaliation. Patience also enables us to endure disagreeable circumstances without dissatisfaction and dejection. It curbs our desires and

aversions, restraining us from transgressions through greedy pursuits or violent reprisals.

Abstinence through eradication *(samucchedavirati)*, the highest form of observing the precepts, comes about automatically with the attainment of the state of an ariyan, one who has reached direct realization of the Dhamma. When the disciple reaches the stage of stream-entry *(sotapatti),* the first of the ariyan stages, he becomes bound to reach full liberation in a maximum of seven more lives. He is incapable of reverting from the course of forward progress towards enlightenment. Simultaneously with his attainment of stream-entry the disciple acquires four inalienable qualities, called the four factors of stream-entry *(sotapattiyanga)*. The first three are unshakable faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. The fourth is completely purified sila. The noble disciple has cut off the defilements which motivate transgressions of the precepts. Thus he can never deliberately violate the five precepts. His observance of the precepts has become "untorn, unrent, unblotched, unmotiled, liberating, praised by the wise, not clung to, conducive to concentration."

VI. The Breach of Sila

To undertake the precepts is to make a determination to live in harmony with them, not to ensure that one will never break them. Despite our determination it sometimes happens that due to carelessness or the force of our conditioning by the defilements we act contrary to the precepts. The question thus comes up as to what to do in such cases.

One thing we should not do if we break a precept is to let ourselves become ridden by guilt and self-contempt. Until we reach the planes of liberation it is to be expected that the defilements can crop up from time to time and motivate unwholesome actions. Feelings of guilt and self-condemnation do nothing to help the matter but only make things worse by piling on an overlay of self-aversion. A sense of shame and moral scrupulousness are central to maintaining the precepts but they should not be allowed to become entangled in the coils of guilt.

When a breach of the precepts takes place there are several methods of making amends. One method used by monks to gain exoneration in regard to infringements on the monastic rules is confession. For certain classes of monastic offenses a monk can gain clearance simply by confessing his transgression to another monk. Perhaps with suitable modifications the same procedure could be applied by the laity, at least with regard to more serious violations. Thus if there are a number of lay people who are earnestly intent on following the path, and one falls into a breach of a precept, he can confess his lapse to a Dhamma friend, or, if one is not available, he can confess it privately before an image of the Buddha. It must be stressed, however, that confession does not aim at gaining absolution. No one is offended by the ethical lapse, nor is there anyone to grant forgiveness. Also, confession does not abrogate the kamma acquired by the transgression. The kamma has been generated by the deed and will produce its due effect if it gains the opportunity. The basic purpose of confession is to clear the mind of the remorse bearing upon it as a consequence of the breach. Confession especially helps to prevent the concealment of the lapse, a subtle maneuver of the ego used to bolster its pride in its own imagined perfection.

Another method of making amends is by retaking the five precepts, reciting each precept in turn either in the presence of a monk or before an image of the Buddha. This new undertaking of the precepts can be reinforced by a third measure, namely, making a strong determination not to fall into the same transgression again in the future. Having applied these three methods one can then perform more virtuous actions as a way of building up good kamma to counteract the unwholesome kamma acquired through the breach of the precept. Kamma tends to produce its due result and if this tendency is sufficiently strong there is nothing we can do to blot it out. However, kamma does not come to fruition always as a matter of strict necessity. Kammic tendencies push and tug with one another in complex patterns of relationship. Some tend to reinforce the results of others, some to weaken the results, some to obstruct the results. If we build up wholesome kamma through virtuous actions, this pure kamma can inhibit the unwholesome kamma and prevent it from reaching fruition. There is no guarantee that it will do so, since kamma is a living process, not a mechanical one. But the tendencies in the process can be understood, and since one such tendency is for the wholesome to counteract the unwholesome and hinder their undesired results, a helpful power in overcoming the effects of breaking the precepts is the performance of virtuous actions.

VII. The Similes for Sila

The texts illustrate the qualities of sila with numerous similes, but as with the three refuges we must again limit ourselves to only a few. Sila is compared to a stream of clear water, because it can wash off the stains of wrong actions which can never be removed by the waters of all other rivers. Sila is like sandalwood, because it can remove the fever of the defilements just as sandalwood (according to ancient Indian belief) can be used to allay bodily fever. Again sila is like an ornament made of precious jewels because it adorns the person who wears it. It is like a perfume because it gives off a pleasant scent, the "scent of virtue," which unlike ordinary perfume travels even against the wind. It is like moonbeams because it cools off the heat of passion as the moon cools off the heat of the day. And sila is like a staircase because it leads upwards by degrees -- to higher states of future existence in the fortunate realms, to the higher planes of concentration and wisdom, to the supernormal powers, to the paths and fruits of liberation, and finally to the highest goal, the attainment of nibbana.

Notes

1. *Khuddakapatha-Atthakatha:* Saranagatanam ten'eva saranagamanena bhayam santasam dukkham duggatim parikkilesam himsati vidhamati niharati nirodheti. [Go back]

2. It should be remarked that although the ariyan Sangha can include lay persons, the word "Sangha" is never used in the Theravada Buddhist tradition to include the entire body of practitioners of the teaching. In ordinary usage the word signifies the order of monks. Any extension beyond this would tend to be considered unjustified. [Go back]

3. Tappasada-taggarutahi vihatakileso tapparayanatokarappavatto cittuppado saranagamanam. [Go back]

4. *Natthi me saranam aññam Buddho (Dhammo Sangho) me saranam varam* -- traditional Buddhist devotional stanzas. [Go back]

5. Though the traditional literature always explains the breach of the refuge as occurring though a change of allegiance, it would seem that a complete loss of interest in the Triple Gem and the feeling that reliance on a refuge is not necessary would also break the commitment to the threefold refuge. [Go back]

6. Khuddakapatha Atthakatha (Khp. A.), p. 26. [Go back]

7. Khp. A., p. 26. [Go back]

8. Majjimanikaya Atthakatha, Vol. I, p. 202 (Burmese ed.). [Go back]

9. Khp. A., p. 26. [Go back]

10. Khp. A., p. 26. [Go back]

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